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CHARLES READE

CHARLES READE

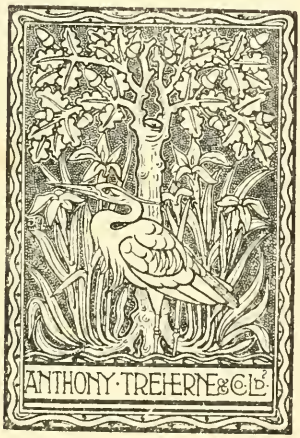
AS I KNEW HIM

By JOHN COLEMAN

AUTHOR OF

"FIFTY YEARS OF AN ACTOR'S LIFE," ETC. ETC.

A NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION



LONDON

ANTHONY TREHERNE & CO., LTD.

3 AGAR STREET, STRAND

1904

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FOREWORDS

The reader who expects to discover herein an erudite disquisition on Charles Reade's literary achievements is recommended to turn to the Encyclopediæ.

It is hoped, however, that he who desires to see the man "in his habit as he lived," may find the following narrative not altogether destitute of interest.

"Good wine needs no bush," and the autobiographical portion of the work may be left to speak for itself.

For the rest—

> "Never anything can be amiss
> When simpleness and duty tender it";

hence I lay this cluster of "forget-me-nots" on the graves of those whom I loved while living, and whom I mourn now they are dead.

J. C.

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Prologue

FIVE-AND-THIRTY YEARS AGO

Photo by C. Allen, Tenby]

CHARLES READE
ÆTAT 45

PROLOGUE

BEARDING THE LION IN HIS DEN

The Lion's Lair in Mayfair—A Mad Sailor amidst the Edinburgh Comedians — Christie Johnstone Days — Tom Robertson *loquitur* — An Angel in Dove-coloured Satin, and an Airy Youth in Black Velvet—Boucicault's pessimistic Verdict on "Never too Late to Mend" — A delightful Dinner-party at Bolton Row — Dion and the Duchess — Doctor Sampson ("Hard Cash") and the Colleen Bawn—Leo and his Egeria —Brains and Beauty—Mirth and Music—Boucicault as Jack Sheppard and Sir Giles Overreach—"The Wearing of the Green"—Commencement of a life-long Intimacy between the Chronicler and the Author

"So! You've come to beard the Lion in his den?" growled the giant, advancing aggressively and presenting his Gillett's Magnum Bonum like a bayonet in full charge at my breast.

The sight of this portentous figure evoked such a vivid impression of my boyhood that I involuntarily exclaimed, "The mad sailor, by Jove!"

"Mad sailor! What do you mean, sir? I may say, what the devil do you mean?"

"Well, I beg your pardon, but—were you ever in Edinburgh?"

"Ever in Edinburgh! Ever! Scores of times in the Christie Johnstone days."

"Christie Johnstone!"

"Ha! you knew her then?"

"I know the story, and a delightful story it is."

"H'm! You think so?"

"Think! I know."

"So do I! But that doesn't bring us a bit nearer the point. What did you mean by dubbing me 'the mad sailor'?"

"I didn't!"

"Then who the deuce did?"

"First let me ask—Do you remember the first row in the pit of the Edinburgh Theatre?"

"I ought to, for 'many a time and oft' in the dog days I've monopolised it till second price."

"And 'many a time and oft' I've seen you in your flannels and your straw hat, with your feet sprawling at full length on the benches, while your head lolled against the front of the boxes, and when the second price came tumbling in you didn't seem to like it."

"I didn't. Like the mad King of Bavaria, I wanted to keep the show all to myself."

"But you couldn't. And when the pitites routed you out we used to peep through the hole in the curtain and enjoy the fun."

"And who, pray, had the infernal impudence to christen me 'The mad sailor'?"

"Bob Wyndham."

"What! handsome Bob? Like his cheek! And so you were one of the Edinburgh boys?"

"Yes."

"You must have been a youngster—I was young myself then. 'Oh the days and nights in Egypt'—I mean in Athens! Breakfasted?"

"Hours ago."

"The day's hot! You look tired. Sit down, and excuse me while I finish this letter."

With that, he rolled over like an old salt and came to anchor at the writing-desk; and while he wrote I took stock of him and his surroundings. As nearly as I could judge, he appeared to be about fifty or fifty-five years of age. He stood over six feet high, a massive chest, Herculean limbs, a bearded and leonine face, giving traces of a manly beauty which ripened into majesty as he grew older. Large brown eyes, which could at times become exceedingly fierce, a fine head, quite bald at top, but covered at the sides with soft brown hair, a head so strangely disproportioned to the bulk of his body that I never could understand how so large a brain could be confined in so small a cranium.

His attire, as eccentric as himself, consisted principally of a pair of huge sailor bags, braced up nearly to the arm-pits above, and broadening out below to almost elephantine proportions, over a pair of dandyfied cloth boots with patent leather tips.

He was coatless, and his shirt-sleeves were turned up almost to his elbows.

In strange contrast to this ancient mariner figure, exactly opposite to him stood a fine replica of the Venus of Milo. Half-a-dozen paintings of considerable value hung on the walls, and various articles of *bric-à-brac* were scattered about in every hole and corner.

Though 'twas near mid-day, the breakfast things were still on the table. Crumpled newspapers, from the *Times* to the *Police News*, from *Galignani's* to the *New York Clipper* were strewn about the floor; a couple of huge clothes-baskets (not ordinary waste-paper baskets) were crammed to overflowing with all kinds of rubbish, and a bundle of books and magazines lay in a heap on the table under the window. Three or four agendas and scrap-books were at his feet, while half-a-dozen folio sheets of drab-coloured MS. bespattered with ink, bescrawled with hieroglyphics, "deleted" here and "stetted" there, and interlined everywhere, were scattered about in slatternly confusion.

After all these years I recall quite clearly this first impression of Charles Reade and his "lion's den" (which was also his dining-room) in Bolton Row, Mayfair.

The night before I had met Tom Robertson at the Arundel. A short time previous he had been Reade's prompter (long before the "Caste" days), and the irate author had trod on the corns of the ambitious and irascible aide-de-camp: hence there was little love lost between them.

"Going to see Reade, are you? About that rotten 'Never too late to mend,' too! Yet you turned up your nose at 'Shadow Tree Shaft,' which is worth six of it. Well, mind what you are about!

You are a warm 'member,' but he's warmer. Mad! mad as a March hare! You'll be punching each other's heads in ten minutes."

While dubitating as to whether Robertson was right, the lion rose, rang the bell, motioned the maid to clear away the breakfast things, and gave her the letter to post.

"Now then, young man, let us come to cues. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing about myself. But a great deal about 'Never too late to mend.'"

"Well, fire away!"

"I had never read it until Tuesday. I began after breakfast, and never left until I had finished it."

"Sir, you're a man of taste. Not many of 'em knocking about. You seem—fatigued. So am I. Suppose we broach a bottle—only a small bottle of sparkling!"

"No, thanks! not before dinner."

"Right, sir, right. I never take anything before dinner myself, but the circumstances are exceptional, and I thought perhaps that you——What! you won't? Very well. Of course, you know I've been robbed and plundered and murdered by those paste-and-scissors pirates and their accomplices—those infernal thieves of managers. But, thank God! I've licked 'em at last."

"Glad to hear it."

"Glad! you—a manager? I thought you were all leagued together."

"Not all. Besides, you forget—*I* am an actor!"

"So are the others! At least, they think they are! But never mind them. You know the genesis of the story?"

"Certainly. Your play of 'Gold.'"

"You know 'Gold' then?"

"Rather! Smith offered me George Fielding."

"Why didn't you take it?"

"Nothing less than Hamlet would have suited my fireplace then."

"That's the reason you shunted my poor George Fielding. Ever see my play acted?"

"Yes, at Drury Lane, Bristol, and Glasgow."

"Was it well done in the country?"

"Capitally. In some respects better than in town."

"The deuce! How was that?"

"Because Chute and Glover had brains."

"A manager with brains! Well, I should like to see one."

"Then, sir, I hope you see one now!"

"Of course, of course—present company always excepted. But how about Chute and Glover?"

"Well, to begin with, they hit upon an original idea."

"Indeed!"

"Yes! they had a panoramic act drop, which led the spectator from England to the Antipodes."

"Splendid! Why the deuce didn't it draw?"

"Perhaps because it was in advance of the time, and you know it's as bad to be in advance of the time as behind it."

"Worse—worse! So you think that was the reason of the 'frost'?"

"Not the only one. The 'Uncle Tom' fever had set in, and 'Beecher Stowe on the brain' had something to do with it. Anyhow, where they took £10 to 'Gold' they took £100 to 'Uncle Tom.'"

"An unanswerable argument! Wooden-headed, beastly British public! Yet, despite this abject, miserable failure, you are disposed to put your money on 'Never too late to mend'?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"To dramatise it."

"You are an author, then?"

"I don't presume to call myself an author, but I have vamped up a dozen plays or more, of the common market-garden order."

"From the French?"

"Yes, from the French, and from other sources."

"Oh! then you're one of the pirates yourself?"

"No. I obtained permission from Alexandre Dumas, Macquet, and Paul Feval to dramatise 'Monte Cristo,' 'Katharine Howard,' and 'Le Fils du Diable,' and now——"

"You want mine to dramatise—'It's never too late to mend'?"

"Precisely."

"Suppose I've dramatised it already myself—suppose I've had it printed—sent round to every manager in central London, and suppose not one of the blockheads has ever taken the trouble to read it!"

"Just like 'em—just like 'em! Well, let me read it."

"So you shall."

Then, throwing the door open, he roared, "Laura—Laura! bring me a book of 'Never too late to mend.' The play, mind! *not* the novel!"

The next minute the patter of light feet, the *frou-frou* of a woman's dress was heard in the hall, and in fluttered a gorgeous little creature as beautiful as a butterfly.

"Here you are, Charles," she said, holding forth a book with a yellow cover; then, seeing the litter all over the place, she exclaimed, "Good gracious! you are incorrigible. What is to be done with you, you great baby!"

At this moment the lady and I caught sight of each other. She dropped the book—I picked it up.

"Allow me, Mrs Seymour," said I.

"Hey-day, good people! You appear to know each other," said he.

"Yes—no!" I replied. "Let me see if I'm right. Eight years ago! The Haymarket people at the Sheffield Theatre. 'The Serious Family.' A woman—woman, did I say?—an angel! in dove-coloured satin, rushing off in a huff at the prompt entrance, landed in the arms of——"

"A free-and-easy youth in a black velvet coat, a moustache, and a mop of hair."

"*I* was the youth. I confess the cape and the black velvet coat and the rest of it, but I *wasn't* free-and-easy. Quite the contrary. I apologised—you must remember I apologised."

"You did, you young villain, but you squeezed the life out of me first! Only think! that was actually eight years ago, and we've never met since. But, you see, I've not forgotten you."

"Nor I you! There are some people one never forgets."

"Ahem! What were you doing in the prompt entrance that night?"

"Making my first plunge into management. We commenced the season at Sheffield with a flying visit from the Haymarket people, and I popped over from Liverpool to see how you were getting on. Crowded out in front, I came round to have a peep behind. The scene was enclosed—I happened to be at the door when you threw it open, bounced off, and knocked me all of a heap."

"Knocked, sir! you knocked *me*—knocked the breath out of my body."

"Awfully sorry!"

"Belay there!" interposed the author. "You player folk are all alike, once set your tongues going, and the deuce himself can't stop your jawing tackle, but as I've another thousand words to get off my chest before dinner, I must put a stop to your philandering. Pause, reflect, young man! Remember, your brother-managers one and all have refused to even look at this play, and the only man who *has* looked at it is dead against it."

"Who is he?

"Dion Boucicault."

"Well, he ought to know."

"You're off, then?"

"No! I'm on. He may be wrong. I will read it and judge for myself."

"Better let me read you Boucy's letter first. Ah! Here it is!" and he read aloud

"DUBLIN, *3rd December.*

"MY DEAR READE,—I have read your drama, N. T. L. T. M.' There is in it a very effective piece, but, like the nut within both husk and shell, it wants freedom.

"1st. It will act five hours as it stands.

"2nd. There are scenes which injure dramatically others which follow.

"3rd. There are two characters you are fond of (I suppose), but can never be played. I mean Jacky and the Jew.

"4th. The dialogue wants weeding. It is more in weight than actors — as they breed them now— can carry.

"Total. If you want to make a success with this drama, you must consent to a depleting process, to which Shylock's single pound of flesh must be a mild transaction.

"Have you the courage to undergo the operation? I am afraid you have not.—Ever yours,

"DION BOUCICAULT."

"Now look at the endorsement."

I did, and read as follows:—

"'Boucy advises me to cut out the Jew and Jacky. Aha! old Fox, they will outlive thee and me!'"

"Will? They *shall*! Give me the book."

"You're bent on it, then?"

"Unless you've made the drama a deuced sight worse than the novel, I'll do it!"

"Then you shall, by God! Off you go! Read it—put your heart in it—come to breakfast tomorrow, and tell me what you think of it."

"I will."

"Remember, ten sharp!"

Off I went to the Tavistock, denied myself to everybody, and devoted the entire evening to the play.

When I turned up next morning Leo was all impatient to know what I thought about it.

"The first difficulty is the fact that it's three big

plays rolled into one, and the strongest act of all is the very one which could most easily be eliminated."

"You mean the prison?"

"Yes. The play would be complete without it."

"You would knife it, then?"

"God forbid! It will be *the* act of the play."

"Good lad, good lad! I see we shall get on together."

"We shall, if you'll only give me a free hand with the blue pencil."

"What! cut!—cut my composition?"

"Remember what Scribe said to the comedian who requested permission to cut a long speech. 'Cut, by all means,' said Scribe. 'The line that is never acted is—never hissed.'"

"That's true; but, recollect, every line you cut out cuts into my flesh and blood; so do your slashing gently!"

"Nothing of the kind," interposed Mrs Seymour. "Cut an hour out of it—cut and come again! It wants knifing awfully! Meanwhile, my good friends, you appear to forget breakfast is waiting."

We were both valiant trenchermen, and did ample justice to the substantial repast. After breakfast he resumed:

"Of course you'll give me entirely new scenery?"

"Certainly! I've designed the scenes already," and I showed him some rough sketches I had made.

"The farm's all right, and so is the Australian act," said he, "but the prison's not a bit like it! I've been over lots of 'em — Durham, Oxford, Reading, Birmingham, the very place where Austin —no, Hawes, I mean!—did that poor boy to death —murdered him—murdered him, and got off with three months. Three months! If I had had the handling of the beast, he'd have been hung, drawn, and quartered!"

"Charles, Charles, do be moderate."

"Moderate, moderate! Bah! you're a woman, and can't understand. You don't know! In less

than three years the ruffian drove twelve unhappy wretches to attempt suicide. Three of them actually did the trick, and the assassin got three months. Three months! It makes one impious to think upon it. What's the good of talking about God's vengeance against murder, I'd like to know? But there, there! Let's have done with the brute!

"And now, would you mind reading me George Fielding's farewell to the farm?"

As I read the lines, the tears trembled in my voice, and overflowed from Mrs Seymour's beautiful eyes. Blowing his nose like a foghorn, Leo rose and paced the room in violent agitation, muttering to himself, "Beautiful—beautiful—music—music—isn't it?" Then, turning upon me abruptly, he desired me to give Tom Robinson's curse in the prison scene. When I had finished he exclaimed, "Sublime! terrible! appalling! My only fear is, if you let him have it like that they'll be sorry for that beast of a Hawes. Now, seriously, on your honour, sir, do you think that Lear's curse is 'in it' with this?"

When we laughed at his almost boyish exuberance he was not at all offended, but laughed heartily as he said:

"No, no, it isn't exactly that; but I can't help kicking when those d——d asses, the critics, try to hang dead men's bones round living men's necks! Of course *you'll* play Tom Robinson?"

"I'd rather do George Fielding."

"What—what! and leave that splendid piece of vituperation to some emasculated duffer? No, sir, no—I want a man for that! You must do the 'cuss' yourself—or I'm off!"

On this point he was inexorable, and so it came to pass that I was the original Tom Robinson.

After settling terms and the arrangement of the prison scene, I was about to take my departure, when he said, "Hold hard! Mrs Seymour has improvised a little dinner-party to-night; she says it is in honour of the advent of *It is never too late to*

mend. I rather think it is in honour of the free-and-easy youth in the black velvet coat who hugged her behind the scenes at Sheffield."

"Charles, how can you?"

"Well, if he didn't hug you, you hugged him—so it's as broad as it's long!"

"Don't talk nonsense."

"My dear child, without a little nonsense the world would be very grey and dull. Now look here, youngster. This is not intended to be a formal function. There will be only three or four friends. Two of them you know already — Boucicault and his bonnie little wife—Doctor Dickson and two very charming women. Dickey can look after the Colleen Bawn, Mrs E. is accustomed to take charge of me, and you, madam, can look after your friend here!"

What a delightful evening that was!

Our host was the soul of hospitality. Mrs Seymour did the honours with a dainty grace peculiarly her own, and our guests were charming, Boucicault especially. This distinguished actor and author had (so he himself told me) left England under a cloud, but had "cast his nighted colour off" in America, and returned to triumph. When we first met he was living *en grand seigneur* in the famous mansion at Kensington Gore which had formerly been the home of the Countess of Blessington. He was then making a fortune one moment, and spending it the next.

His was a most interesting personality. Stroke him gently he was an angel — ruffle his feathers and he was a devil.

I suppose we are all, more or less, built that way—he rather more so than otherwise. He has often told me that he had encountered every vicissitude of fortune: sometimes without a postage stamp, at other times all over money. A veritable Irish Gascon — with the most delicious taste of the potato on his tongue.

His accomplishments were many and varied. He knew something about everything, and what he

didn't know about the popular drama (which to some extent he incarnated in himself) wasn't worth knowing. Although no longer young, his mind was alert as a boy's, and I can well believe what Charles Mathews, Walter Lacey, and John Brougham often told me—that in his juvenalia he was the most fascinating young scapegrace that ever baffled or bamboozled a bailiff.

He was still handsome. His head, though perfectly bald, was shaped like the dome of a temple, and was superbly, I may say, Shakespeareanly beautiful. His face was a perfect oval, his eyes brilliant, his figure elegant.

Old stagers were wont to say he was a mere replica of Tyrone Power—the famous comedian who perished in the wreck of the ill-fated *President*. But that great actor was before my time, and I can only speak of what I know.

Hudson, Leonard, Collins, and Gustavus Brooke were all excellent in the "Irish Attorney," "The Irish Post," "Rory O'More," "White Horse of the Peppers," "His Last Legs," etc., but Boucicault was a model to himself.

Then his dramas?

The "Colleen Bawn" and "Arrah na Pogue" inaugurated a new era.

Those who were so fortunate as to see these delightful creations in their first blush of popularity can never forget the dawning of "Myles and Eily," of "Shaun the Post," and "Arrah of the Kiss."

At this particular juncture he was getting up "The Poor of London" at the Princess's. Reade had acquired the rights of "Les Pauvres de Paris" from Macquet, and this circumstance, combined with Mrs Seymour's long acquaintance with Dion, led to a friendly intimacy between the two authors.

Both were remarkable men. Reade had gained his fellowhip at Oxford at one-and-twenty, and Boucicault produced "London Assurance" at Covent Garden at two-and-twenty.

On the night of our little party Dion was

Photo by W. & D. Downey, Newcastle]

DION BOUCICAULT

Photo by London Stereoscopic and Photographic Co.

AGNES BOUCICAULT
(THE COLLEEN BAWN)

at his best. The ladies, too, contributed their quota, and Dr Dickson was inimitable. Availing himself every now and then of a pause in the witty warfare between the two authors, he would let out some quaint, pawky saying, which convulsed us with laughter. I had just been reading "Hard Cash," and Dr Dickson's manner struck me so much that I couldn't help hazarding the remark: "Pray, pardon me, but you remind me wonderfully of Dr Sampson." At this there was a roar. Dr Sampson was Dr Dickson himself, and his honest face flushed with gratified vanity, as indeed did the author's, at my involuntary compliment to the fidelity of the likeness.

"Ah! you robber," said Dickson, "see how brutally you've caricatured me, since the boy is enabled to spot me the moment I open my mouth. I'll bring an action for libel against you, Charlie. I will now; 'pon my soul, I will."

(Some time afterwards, speaking to Leo about his wonderful portraiture of this gentleman, he said: "Come into my workshop, and I'll show you how it is done." We went into his study, where he picked out of a hundred huge sheets of drab millboard, one headed "Dickybirdiana." ("Dicky" was a pet name for Dickson.) The sheet was divided into sectional columns, like a newspaper, and every column was filled with MS. in Reade's writing, containing anecdotes, traits of character, peculiarities of pronunciation, and a perfect analysis of Dr Dickson. It was thus that Leo laboured from first to last in the construction of character, and in the building up of his works.)

After dinner Boucicault sang us "The Wearing o' the Green" (this was before the production of "Arrah na Pogue") with such fervour, that it set every drop of Irish blood in my body boiling, and made me, for the time being, as big a rebel as my grandfather was before me, and he was pitch-capped twice, hung up to a lamp-post once, and once taken out to be shot, yet was at the last moment saved

through the intervention of the Duchess of Leinster, and lived to tell the story nearly half-a-century after '98. But I am digressing.

"Boucy, my boy," said Reade, "I've found a manager at last with brains."

"The devil you have! Kill him, then—stuff him, and put him under a glass case and make a Mascotte of him. Where is he?"

"Here! Our young friend has taken a fancy to 'It's never too late to mend,' and is going to do it."

"Where?" enquired Dion.

"In Leeds," I replied.

"A one-horse shay place. Anyhow, it was so when I was leading actor in the York circuit."

"I didn't know you were ever a leading actor."

"Ever, sir! I was the original Jack Sheppard in your beastly hole of a theatre."

"Tate Wilkinson thought it charming."

"Ah! that was a hundred years ago, and a good deal of water has flowed under Leeds bridge since then. Well, I hope you'll have better luck with 'It's never too late to mend' than I had with Jack Sheppard, for I came a cropper of twenty feet from the flies, and nearly broke every bone in my body in the escape from Newgate."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I thought I'd got my quietus. They had to drop the curtain, and Leigh Murray took my part, while his (Thames Darrell) was taken by Bob Roxby. That was my last appearance in Leeds."

"And your last as a leading actor, I suppose?"

"Oh dear no! I opened immediately after at Brighton as Sir Giles Overreach."

The idea of Boucicault, with that accent, appearing as Sir Giles tickled Reade's fancy so much that he roared.

"Did you make Sir Giles an Irishman, Dion?"

"Did the devil! No, sir; I made him a great tragic part!"

"But I always thought you were a comedian."

"Garrick was a great tragedian, but he played Abel Drugger, and Kayne—no, I mayne Kean—played Jerry Sneak. But never mind me."

"You're a practical man, John. If you're going to put your money on 'It's never too late to mend,' try to persuade this maniac to cut the prison act and let the Jew and Jacky go by the board."

"No, dear Dion, I nail my colours to the mast. The prison scene, the Jew, and Jacky—or no 'Never too late to mend.'"

"Very well—as 'a friend whose expectations lay behind his hopes'—here's success to 'It's never too late to mend'!"

We drank the toast in a bumper, and "shut up in measureless content."

That was a red-letter day in my life, for there and then commenced a friendship between Charles Reade and myself which endured to the last moment of his existence.

Book the First

LOOKING BACKWARD

A Retrospect

of

Half-a-Century

Related by Charles Reade

to the Chronicler hereof

"The story of my life . . .
I ran it thro' even from my boyish days
To the very moment that he bade me tell it."

INTRODUCTION

Always eccentric, our author was not infrequently stern as a Stoic, deaf as an adder, dumb as an oyster, unbending and severe.

In these repellent moods the old lion was wont to growl, "I don't throw my pearls before swine!" But if he happened to like his interlocutor (more especially if they were alone together), the ice thawed, and he was glad to open his heart.

In these more genial moments he confided to the writer, at various intervals, the following recollections of his early trials and struggles. They are here recounted as nearly as possible in the form in which they were originally related, and to give them verisimilitude I have ventured to introduce

CHARLES READE

IN PROPRIA PERSONÂ

Book the First

LOOKING BACKWARD

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CHAPTER I

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EDUCATION

In a Ball-room at Oxford Assizes more than a Century ago—A Lady from India and a Gentleman from Ipsden fall in Love at Sight—Dance all Night, marry, and live happy ever after —Remarkable Result of this accidental *Rencontre*—A Quiver full of Olive Branches — Four Girls and seven Boys — Five Boys take Service with "John Company"—All become more or less distinguished — Two of the Girls equally fortunate in their Matrimonial Alliances — Charles comes last, but ultimately realises the Adage: "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first" — My Lady goes to take the Waters at Bath — Charles (*ætat* four) is breeched and sent with his Brother Compton to a Dame's School at Reading, and doesn't like it—On my Lady's Return the Boys are brought Home—Charles is placed under the Tutelage of his beloved Sister Julia, who teaches him all she knows, which is a great deal — She is married, and Charles, broken-hearted, is sent to Dr Scourger's, where the Boy obtains a Foretaste of Hell — The good old Times — Emancipation — Charles joins Compton at Staines School — His first Visit to the Parish Church is nigh being his last—A Catastrophe and a Wooden Leg—Edwin James, Q.C. — *Tempus fugit* — *Ætat* fifteen— End of Schooldays

"BIRTH, parentage, and education, eh?"

"That covers a lot of ground; but as your beloved bard puts it in your beloved "Pericles," 'so thou wouldst know'—I am the incarnation of a fortuitous concourse of atoms."

("*A paradox, sir, a paradox!*")

"Granted! 'This was sometime a paradox,' but (as your friend Hamlet sententiously observes) 'now the time gives it proof!'—therefore perpend.

"Upwards of seventy years ago there happened to be a ball at Oxford during the Assize week. To

this ball, by pure accident, came a handsome young gentleman from Wallingford to beguile an idle hour; by equally pure accident, thither came an equally handsome young lady from the other side of the globe.

"They had never seen or heard of each other, but mark—'what great events from trifling causes spring.' Had that beautiful young creature not gone to that ball, the chances are ten to one I should not have been spinning this yarn to you to-night. 'It's never too late to mend' and other masterpieces, destined to live when I am gone, would never have seen the light.

"The auspicious star of accident was, however, happily in the ascendant. The lady and gentleman aforesaid, met at the ball, fell in love at sight, danced together all night, and, like the prince and princess in the fairy tale, married and lived happy ever after. Anyhow, in the fulness of time, the gentleman begat and the lady brought forth eleven bouncing bairns —four girls and seven boys, and I'm one of 'em; the youngest of the lot!"

("*But your father and mother?*")

"My father was John Reade, gentleman commoner of Oriel, Lord of the Manor of Ipsden Huntercombe, Ipsden Bassett, and of half the manor of Checkenden, Oxon; and my mother was Anna Maria, elder daughter of Major Scott Waring, M.P., military secretary to Warren Hastings when he was Governor of India.

"When his chief got into trouble the major stood up for him like a man, and was not afraid to cross swords even with so formidable an antagonist as the renowned Edmund Burke, who stigmatised my maternal grandsire as 'a jackal,' while he returned the compliment by dubbing his illustrious adversary a 'reptile.'

(*Obviously compliments passed when gentlefolk differed in those days.*)

"Human nature is much the same at all times.

"Well, when the major returned from India he

left his two boys behind, but brought his two beautiful girls home with him. This was an inversion of the ordinary routine, in accordance with which, it was customary for young English girls to be sent to India to shake the pagoda tree, shut their eyes and open their mouths, and take what came in the shape of a husband.

"It was unnecessary for the mater and her sister to shake the pagoda tree—the major had already done that for them, and was prepared to provide them with substantial dowries, when 'the hour and the man' arrived.

"Mother was a rabid partisan of Hastings, and a bitter enemy of Burke, whom she was wont to describe as 'a truculent and bumptious bog-trotter, with a Tipperary brogue to frighten a stallion into fits.' 'The horrid creature,' she continued, 'played havoc with the English language, and murdered the names of the Indian princes, invariably calling the Begum the "Bay-Gum!"'

"Despite her antipathy to the great orator, mother was the soul of amiability and hospitality. Beautiful, accomplished, distinguished, she was the beau—or is it the belle?—ideal of a *grande dame.*

"As for dad, he belonged to a type now rapidly becoming extinct. Tall and stalwart, a model of manly beauty, a splendid cricketer, a capital angler, and a dead shot; not effusive, not amazingly intellectual (mother brought the brains into the family!), but pious, God-fearing, just, a good landlord, a kind neighbour, a friend to the honest and the poor!

"He rode to hounds at every meet as conscientiously as he took his seat on the bench (where he was a terror to rogues and vagabonds—above all to poachers!), he read prayers morning and night to the household, went to church on high days and holidays, and thrice a day on Sundays; thoroughly believing all the time that the Game Laws were a divine institution for the protection of the preserves of country gentlemen.

"Dear old dad! Peace to your memory! You saw according to your lights; and the best of us can do no more than that.

"When the mater became Lady Bountiful of Ipsden, she devoted herself steadily to 'do her duty in that state of life to which it had pleased Providence to call her.' The old manor-house was metamorphosed into a habitable residence, but habitable as it was, it soon became too small for the continually increasing family.

"Having provided children for the State, mother felt perfectly convinced that it was the duty of the State to provide for them. There had been a little friction 'twixt her and granddad, who was a great admirer of the sex, especially of the theatrical portion thereof. Wherefore, having buried grandmother, he took unto himself a second wife. 'Number Two' was said to have been a distinguished actress.

"Poor lady! she had only a short reign, which came to an untimely end, under remarkable circumstances, some two or three years before I was born.

"Granddad lived at Peterborough House, Fulham, where he was accustomed to dispense hospitality right royally. There had been a masked ball, attended by Prince Florizel, his royal brothers, and other people of light and leading. I presume the company, after the fashion of the time, were more or less 'elevated' when the function came to an end, and, doubtless, since Jack likes to follow his master's lead, the household followed suit.

"Anyhow, it is quite certain that the charming young creature, who had been the cynosure of all eyes over night, next morning was found lying stone dead, her neck broken, her face still masked, at the foot of the grand staircase. How she came there was a mystery which has never been unravelled from that day to this.

"After bewailing her loss for a short time, the disconsolate widower took unto himself another

Photo by H. Jenkins, Wallingford]

"THE SQUIRE"

CHARLES READE'S FATHER

Photo by H. Jenkins, Wallingford]

"THE LADY BOUNTIFUL OF IPSDEN"

CHARLES READE'S MOTHER

mate—'a lady with a past.' She was the widow of a naval officer: previous to her marriage with whom, she had graciously presented the eighth Duke of Hamilton with a daughter, who ultimately became Lady Rossmore.

"Spouse 'Number Three' married and buried granddad, inherited the bulk of his property, and died in the odour of sanctity, over a hundred years of age.

"This is all I recollect of the family tree, though mother, poor dear, never wearied of tracing her royal descent from Malcolm Canmore, David, King of Scotland, John Balliol, Llewellyn of Wales, Edward the First, Margaret of France, The Fair Maid of Kent, John of Gaunt, Oliver Cromwell, and I don't know how many others. When I used to tease her by declaring that dad got his good looks from his maternal granddam, the village blacksmith's daughter, whom dad's father ran away with, her anger knew no bounds.

"'Your father's father was a boy, and knew no better. But to dare to put a play-actress into mamma's place!—it's abominable!'

"This was a sore place with the mater, and was the reason why the theatre was taboo at Ispden, except when she spoke of Miss Farren. Immediately before the marriage of this famous play-actress with the Earl of Derby, mother had seen her play Lady Teazle. Only set her tongue going on this subject, how she would gush! Whether her appreciation of this performance arose from the genius of the actress, or from her having become an ornament of the aristocracy, I am unable to say. Perhaps she was impressed by both.

"Granddad's infatuation for the stage had evidently overleaped one generation and alighted on the next. Hence, his youngest grandson became the theatrical maniac of the family, and so he remains to this day. This infernal profession of yours has a delightful—diabolical fascination for me! To be a great actor is to inherit a gift of the gods!

"How I envy you fellows—envied by the men, adored by the women—admired by both!

"To act a great part, the huge assemblage hanging on your breath while you distil noble words and sublime thoughts into liquid, living music—to know that a thousand hearts are throbbing responsive to your own—to feel that they rise with you to passion, melt with you to pathos, or sink with you to despair—surely this is to drink the full-flowing wine of life in one foaming goblet!

"Ah! could I only have been an actor—a great actor, mind you! Alas! I hadn't the gift!

"Still, I know a thing or two, can do a thing or two. Can sing a bit, dance a bit, fiddle a bit, —and, if I can't act a play, I can write one, and show you beggars how it *should* be acted—some comfort in that!

"As I was saying, there was a little friction between granddad and his daughter about spouse number two, but the mater was too shrewd and too sensible to let that stand in the way of her boys. She knew the ways of 'John Company,' and made granddad pull the ropes, while she guided them, with the result that she succeeded in getting writerships in the Civil Service for three of her boys, and cavalry cadetships for two more.

"They made a good start, came rapidly to the fore, and were all more or less distinguished, while my brother Compton and I were tied to mother's apron-strings at home.

"Ispden, which was a ramshackle old place, dreadfully cold and draughty even in the summer, had got out of repair and required overhauling. Hence, while it was being put in order, 'Madam Mère' concluded to go to Bath and take the waters.

"Now the city of King Bladud was still an awfully swell place, and madame, although a matron, was younger than her years, and didn't care to have a pair of bucolic brats yelping at her heels on the Parade or in the Pump Room. Hence it was determined

that, while she made holiday, my brother Compton and I were to be sent to a dame's school at Reading. I was but a kiddie of four years of age, when to my consternation I was unfrocked, breeched, and bundled into the carriage with Compton.

"Father drove us to Reading, tipped us a crown apiece, bade us be good boys, and left us to the tender mercies of Mother Bradley. She was a good sort—which is more than could be said of her grub.

"At home we ate of the best, and plenty of it, so, when at our first dinner I was confronted with a stodgy mass of boiled rice and grease (train-oil, I think!), I blurted out, 'I want to go home to my mammy!' and was not pacified till Compton whispered, 'Shut up! mutton's coming next.'

"Mother Bradley came from Norfolk, where to this day it is the custom to take the edge off youthful appetites by slabs of Norfolk dumplings—beastly stuff! The mutton, however, did turn up ultimately—and the rice hadn't taken the edge off my appetite, I promise you.

"Happily our stay at Reading was only for one quarter, and we were delighted to get back to Ipsden. What with paint and putty, and one thing and the other, we scarcely knew the old place.

"My nursery (I was the infant of the house!) had been metamorphosed into a schoolroom, of which my sister Julia was the presiding genius.

"Compton, who was getting a big chap, was soon sent to a private tutor near Oxford, while I remained the particular charge of Julia, who was my nurse, teacher, playmate, mother as well as sister, for three or four happy years. At last she married Captain Allen Gardner, and I was 'left lamenting.'

"I say 'lamenting' advisedly, for her wedding-day was the most miserable day of my life. She insisted on taking me to Ipsden Church to see her 'turned off.' I howled the whole of the way, and

when I saw the bridegroom and his best man, the bridesmaids in all their fallalls, the carriages (it seemed as if half the county was there), I howled the more.

"After the wedding-breakfast, when they drove off amidst a shower of rice and old shoes, my shoe hit Allen's hat and squashed it, and I wished it had squashed him!

"I was now eight years of age, and my dear good Julia being no longer at hand to take charge of the *enfant terrible* (for such I had become), I was packed off to Dr Scourger's, at Kettlebury. How I came to be placed under that pedagogic brute of a parson I can't understand now, for my brother Bill had already gone through this purgatory, though he disdained to complain at home. The fact was—besides being born with the nerves of a bulldog—he had a fine sense of humour. One day, when the beast had whacked him within an inch of his life, Bill blandly remarked, 'Take it easy, old hoss, I ain't in a hurry!'

"It was the fashion in those 'good old times' for boys to be browbeaten and bullied, clapper-clawed, unbreeched, and birched on the slightest provocation. Parents and guardians believed that this precious process hardened and made men of them. The wonder is, it didn't make them devils!

"My probation at this diabolical place gave me so vivid a foretaste of the torments of hell, that I wonder to this day how I ever survived the ordeal.

"It may have been ordained for some wise purpose, inasmuch as in years to come it enabled me to faithfully depict the tortures of the poor boy in the prison of 'Never too late to mend.'

"With all her great and noble qualities, her love for her children in general, and for me in particular, mother was trained in Spartan ideas, and the reality of my sufferings did not impress her, while as for the stern papa, he was an im-

plicit Believer in the biblical axiom, 'He who spareth the rod spoileth the child.'

"My brother Compton, who had got on better than I had, was now sent to the Rev. Mr Hearn's, at Staines, and I was left alone in this Inferno.

"I often wonder now that I didn't 'go' for my tyrant, if only for a game of 'kickshin,' but, you know, 'the great image of authority — a dog's obeyed in office.'

"Finding that I was growing a stalwart fellow, mother didn't bestow a passing thought on my repeated thrashings, but when she found I was making no progress in my studies—that I had, in point of fact, forgotten, or nearly forgotten, all that my darling Julia had taught me, and was in danger of becoming a dunce, that was a very different thing, and a move was determined on.

"When at length the order of release came, and, after five years of absolute penal servitude, I was emancipated from bondage—I was the happiest lad in Oxfordshire.

"When I got back to Ipsden, the stern parents were looking unusually *triste*, but when I burst out in a triumphal jubilate with—

> "'When Israel out of Egypt came
> The proud oppressor's land!'

even the Herr Papa collapsed, and burst into an uncontrollable roar of laughter.

"My holiday did not last long, and after a few weeks I was packed off to Compton, at Staines.

"Compared with Kettlebury, it was like emerging from hell to heaven. Fortunately, my new tutor was a scholar and a gentleman, and I soon began to learn something worth knowing.

"My studies, however, were near being cut short almost at their commencement.

"During my very first visit to Staines Church, while we were singing the Old Hundredth,—the roof collapsed and buried me, and scores of others, beneath the ruins.

"Luckily, Compton escaped unhurt, and my yells, which arose above all the hullabaloo, attracted his attention, so did my sturdy legs, which he found sticking and kicking out of the debris.

"I was soon rescued, with nothing more than a shaking and a spoiled jacket. Some of my fellow-sufferers did not get off quite so easily: half-a-dozen girls had their bonnets squashed and their gowns torn to ribbons, while amongst the boys, broken heads and bloody noses were knocking about in every direction.

"When we had rendered what help we could to our fellow-sufferers, and were about to emerge into the open, we were arrested by an awful shillabaloo.

"Coming up to the spot, we found an ancient mariner with a wooden leg stuck fast in a hole in the floor. We managed to extricate him, but his leg was inextricable, and we had barely succeeded in getting the poor old beggar away when down came a huge beam and made short work with his leg. That didn't matter much though, for we sent round the hat the next day, and got him another and a better one.

"At the end of the next quarter, Compton (who still kept steadily ahead of me) was sent to Oxford, bequeathing me to the supervision of his pal, Edwin James."

("*Edwin James!*")

"You remember him?"

("*Remember the defender of Dr Bernard against that scoundrel Beaubarnais Vergheul, who called himself Bonaparte, and his gang of cut-throats? — I should think I do.*")

"Well, Ned and I were great chums; went out bird-nesting and orchard-robbing, and otherwise enjoying forbidden pleasures. Once we ran away to see a prize-fight between Dutch Sam and the Tipton Slasher, and caught 'Toko' when we came back.

"At length James followed Compton. Almost at the very commencement of his career at the Bar Edwin leaped into fame. The great prizes of his pro-

fession were not only in sight, but almost within his grasp, when, alas! poor Ned! We were friends—'when — friends are brothers'; and I have always deplored his downfall.

When he left I stuck to my books, and, when I was about fifteen, the mater thought I had learnt all I could learn from Mr Hearn; so back I went to Ipsden, till, the other boys being provided for, it became necessary to provide for me.

I was always mother's pet. Having now arrived at the conclusion that I had the makings of a man in me, she urged father to send me to Oxford, for one term, at anyrate, in the hope that I might obtain a scholarship.

Ipsden was only seventeen miles from Oxford.

Two of her most intimate friends there were Dr MacBride (Principal of Maudlen) and Dr Ellerton (one of the Fellows).

The Manor-house was famous for its hospitality. Its port and madeira were the best in Oxfordshire. Our dinners were excellent, and admirably cooked. The mater had not been in India for nothing; hence her curries and chutnées were the envy of the county, and the learned doctors enjoyed a good feed.

She commenced operations by an invitation to dinner, soon followed by another, and yet another. In the fulness of their hearts—and their stomachs—the ingenuous dons confided to her that certain good things, in the shape of demyships, fellowships, etc., occurred in Maudlen at frequent intervals, and were to be had almost for the asking by those who knew the proper way to set about it.

The first vacancy was a demyship—a little thing bringing in about £60 or £80 a year—not bad to start with. It was resolved there and then that my name should be entered on the books of Magdalen College.

My schooldays were over, and a new life opened before me."

CHAPTER II

CAREER AT COLLEGE

Lady Bountiful resolves that her Boy shall be a Bishop—He is entered at Magdalen College, Oxford, and placed under Robert Lowe and Mills—Writes Essay on "Ambition"—Goes in for a Demyship, and gets it at Seventeen Years of Age—Loafs and lazies—Cultivates Curls—Dresses eccentrically—Learns to play the Fiddle and dance a Hornpipe—The Oxford Players—The Hope of the House of Ipsden is stage-struck and dramatises "Peregrine Pickle"—A Vacancy occurs for a Fellowship, for which he is eligible but unprepared—The Awakening—He goes in for his "Great Go," and emerges A Fellow of his College at one-and-twenty—Ostracised at Oxford—Malignant Machinations to deprive him of his Fellowship defeated—Going to Edinburgh to take his Degree as M.D.—Is deterred by the Horrors of the Sawpit—Goes to London, and is entered at Lincoln's Inn, where he eats his Dinners but does nothing else.

"My boyish garments had now to to be discarded for the *toga virilis*, so the squire and the mater took me over to Reading and had me togged out as became the son of the lord of Ipsden Manor, and when term time began they escorted me to Oxford in the state carriage and pair, and duly installed me in my rooms.

Dr MacBride invited us to dinner to meet Routh, the head of the College, a pompous old gentleman who was said to have been an awful swell in his time, but who was now approaching "the lean and slippered pantaloon" period.

Next day, on Ellerton's introduction, an arrangement was made with Robert Lowe (afterwards

Lord Shelbourne) and Mills to coach me up in my curriculum. Then I was taken round to dad's tradesmen in the Oriel days, and introduced, with strict injunctions as to the amount of credit to be given, etc.

Before starting home, he tipped me a "fiver," told me he hoped I should always remember I was a Reade of Ipsden Bassett. Mother kissed me, gave me a valedictory blessing, bade me be a good boy and make haste to be a bishop! This last admonition stuck in my throat, for from the moment I met that beast of a Scourger I never could abide a parson.

Oxford, then as now, was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I admired its delightful groves and gardens, its lovely river, its spacious colleges, its splendid libraries and museums, its magnificent churches; but I was young—alone—and —"O Pylades, what is life without a friend!"

There were lots of youngsters like myself knocking about—but "we hadn't been introduced, don't-yer-know."

If ever there was a fella needed sympathy, I was that fella.

To be sure, Dr MacBride, Ellerton, and my "coaches" were always kind, if not cordial — but youth goes to youth, and I didn't know a chap of my own age in the whole 'Varsity.

Work is the surest panacea for the doldrums, so I set my heart on that demyship and went at my books for all I knew.

I prepared for my competition paper an essay in Addisonian prose, on "Ambition." I thought it magnificent then; it seems rather grandiloquent now. It is the fault of youth. With all its faults, like Mercutio's wound, "it served," and at seventeen I got my demyship. That was in July 1831.

What a blessing is the lightheartedness of youth! Off I went there and then on Shanks's mare to bear the good news to Ipsden. Father was delighted, mother radiant, as she exclaimed,

"The next step, Charley, is a Fellaship."

"I don't suppose you know much about Fellaships, John."

("*True, O King!*")

"Briefly then, the appointment carries with it a stipend commencing at £250 a year—rising ultimately to £600 or more, so long as the Fella remains single. Hence, if he wishes to avoid pauperdom, he is condemned to perpetual celibacy."

("*Infamous!*")

"Infamous? D—nable, dear boy!

To be condemned forever to a life of loneliness was not a pleasant prospect for a youth of my temperament.*

Having gained a small triumph, my *mauvaise honte* melted like mist before the sun, my shyness disappeared like magic, and although I made few friends, I made heaps of acquaintances: all boys like myself, who sedulously devoted themselves to horses, cricketing, boating, boxing, fishing, shooting, bowls, skittles, and archery. Then came three or four years of lazying and loafing and desultory reading to be utilised hereafter.

Amongst other useless accomplishments I developed a taste for fiddling and dancing; in fact, I could "play the fiddle like an angel," and dance a hornpipe like T. P. Cooke.

When the long vacation came I went home, taking my faithful fiddle with me. One or two of my brothers had come back on leave, and some of their boys and girls were down at Ipsden for the holidays. I was only a boy myself then.

One evening the old folk had gone to roost at the other end of the building—we were supposed to be at roost too, but I had invited the youngsters to sneak down to the dining-room to sing songs, tell tales, and enjoy themselves over a bowl of hot lemonade. Carried away by animal spirits, I was easily persuaded to air my newly-acquired accom-

* Happily, Reade lived to see this barbarous survival of the dark ages swept away.

plishments by dancing a hornpipe upon the dining-room table to my own accompaniment.

I was just getting to the coda, the boys and girls were shouting and shrieking and clapping their hands with delight, when who should turn up but the squire, in dressing-gown and nightcap, startled out of his first sleep by the unearthly din.

"What—what! fiddling! at this hour! fiddling! Show me a fiddler and I'll show you a fool! Off! jackanapes! off you go! To bed the whole boiling of you!" and he wound up by consigning me and my fiddle to the place "paved with good intentions."

Obviously after this, my room was preferable to my company, so I returned to Oxford the next day without beat of drum.

It was mighty dull during the Vacation, not a soul there one knew, save two or three dry-as-dust old dons, whom I detested.

I'd got one of my lazy fits upon me. If it hadn't been for "Peregrine Pickle," "Roderick Random," "Tom Jones," and "Tristram Shandy," I don't know what would have become of me. But one can't pick up a "Peregrine Pickle" and "Tom Jones" every day in the week.

The darkest hour is just before the dawn, and when the place had become unendurable, lo! a light! The players, my lad! the players had come!

("*The players!*")

"Of course, you know, from your Cambridge experiences, the authorities (idiots! jackasses!) wouldn't allow the theatre to be open in term time."

("*Yes; I know to my cost!*")

In Colley Cibber's time the Oxford dons were glad enough to invite Barton Booth and the rest of the Drury Lane players to come down to act that high-falutin' "Cato" of Addison's, in one of the College halls (I forget which, but you'll find all about it in Colley Cibber), glad enough too to pocket

the plunder, to provide a splendid peal of bells, which ring out to this day in one of the churches. But one must draw the line somewhere, and the morals of the boys must be preserved from contamination with the profane playhouse!

Well, anyhow, thank God! the players came during the Vacation!

To be sure, the playhouse was a primitive sort of place; but after all, "the play's the thing," and we had "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral comical" every other night, and a new, dazzling, and delightful life opened out before me.

I had read the plays before, but never understood them till now, and the acting was a revelation to me.

The players I thought excellent. There were not many of them, not more than seven or eight, but there was a crowd of girls, fair and dark, tall and short, plump and slender.

It was rumoured that many of them were the daughters of distinguished actors in town and elsewhere, who were entrusted to the manager and manageress to make their maiden efforts.

Some of the girls had considerable ability; all had youth, and most of them beauty.

The leading lady, a Miss Melville, was an accomplished actress and a magnificent woman. The manager's wife, Mrs Barnett, a buxom brunette with great brown eyes, was the best—yes, the very best *soubrette* I've ever seen. The low comedian was a little Hop-o'-my-thumb of a chap named Robson, who took London by storm a few years later. Then my excellent good friend Walter Lacy (I didn't know him then) was about as good a comedian as could be seen anywhere—at least, I thought so.

The manager was the proprietor of the Bath, Ryde, Guildford, and Reading Theatres, and was said to have been a *protégé* of the Kembles.

He was an eccentric old gentleman. Morning, noon, and night he wore an impeccable top hat, a dress suit, a white choker, pumps and perforated black silk stockings. He rarely or ever acted, but whenever

he did, whether it was Capulet, or Francis in "The Stranger" (his pet part), he never changed his pantaloons, his pumps, or his perforations.

You've heard of Old Barnett, I suppose?

("*Heard? I knew him intimately.*")

"I thought these Oxford days were before your time."

("*So they were; but I knew the Barnetts long after that—in the Isle of Wight, Guildford, and Reading.*")

Really!

Well, seeing these good people first inspired me with the thought of being a playwright, so I set to work, dramatised "Peregrine Pickle," and sent it to the old boy, offering it him gratis.

He didn't seem to see it, however, and wrote me a polite note, advising me to send it to Macready, and suggesting that as my MS. was not easily decipherable, a fair copy might be desirable.

I rose to the bait—had my precious "Peregrine" printed at a cost of upwards of £30, and sent it to the eminent one.

It was returned by the next post, with a note from Mr Serle, Macready's secretary, inquiring whether I had been "trying a practical joke; that, if so, the joke was a bad one, and the play worse."

This is the rough brake, my son, through which greatness must pass ere it reaches the summit of ambition.

I know now that Serle was right, and I was an impudent young idiot to have trespassed on Macready's valuable time.

After a recent perusal of this first effusion of the youthful muse, I wrote its epitaph on the fly-leaf in three words — or rather repeated one word thrice, and that word is "Bosh!"

The very day after the players left Oxford I learnt that a vacancy had occurred for a Fellaship —and I—oh, horror!—I was not ready for my exams.!

If, instead of going to the play every night, and writing my precious "Peregrine Pickle," and—I may as well own up!—going about gallivanting with the gels, I had only studied my books!

What was to be done? I had only a month to get ready in.

I don't know how the news reached Ipsden, unless "a bird of the air carried the matter"—Uncle Faber happened to be there on a visit. The very next day he and father and mother burst into my rooms, and opened fire on me.

"This comes of fiddling and fooling," growled the squire.

"And going about with those husseys of play-actresses to the boat-race on Saturday!—a carriage and pair, too. I wonder how you dare look me in the face, sir!" exclaimed the irate mater.

"The idea!" snarled Uncle Faber in his indescribable Yorkshire accent, "of a nevvy of mine goin' about in a green coat, with a pickle cabbage cravat. Strip 'em off, sur! and cut those culls (curls), and luck loike a mon 'stead of a laiker! If thou wert to go up with those beastly brass buttons befoure owd Rawth, he'd send thee packin' befoure thou'dst opened thy mawth!"

This plain speaking did me good, and I went for my "great go" like a bull at a gate.

My time had not been wholly wasted at Mr Hearn's. I was safe in my English—and pretty well grounded in my classics, and with the aid of my coaches, and sticking to my work morning, noon, and night, it seemed possible I might pull through without being ploughed.

Being rather heterodox, I was a little dubious about my theology. I had always shied at that abominable Athanasian Creed, and the Thirty-nine Articles threatened to flummux me altogether. I hammered away at 'em, but I couldn't hammer 'em into my head.

To make matters better, within two days of the examination I had a diabolical attack of neuralgia.

On the fateful morning (I shall never forget it), July 22nd, 1835, I took Uncle Faber's advice, had my hair cut, doffed my green coat, donned a black one, and over that my cap and gown. As I walked across the quad. in an agony—for my face was swollen to twice its size—I met Lowe. "Well, young shaver," said he, "how about the Thirty-nine Articles?"

"Can't get at 'em—I remember only six."

"The odds are that's more than any of 'em do, so keep a good heart, and the chances are you'll pull through. Go, my boy, 'go where glory waits you,' and good luck to you!"

("*This is becoming quite exciting! How did you get on?*")

"All right in Greek, Latin, and Logic."

("*But the Thirty-nine?*")

"Well, as luck would have it, they asked me one of the six I knew!"

("*No?*")

"Yes."

("*Then you came off triumphant?*")

"Not exactly! But 'near or far off—well won is still well shot,' and, at anyrate, I came off as well as Newman."

("*The Cardinal?*")

"Yes, the Cardinal—and the Archbishop—who did us so well at Bishopthorpe when I was staying with you at York last summer. I took my B.A., and succeeded to my fellowship and a permanent income for life before I was one and-twenty."

("*Wonderful!*")

"'I believe you, my boy.' Malignant but ineffectual efforts were made to invalidate my election on the ground of a technical informality. Thanks, however, to the good offices of mother's old friend Sumner, Bishop of Winchester, they failed; and I retained my Fellaship, and do retain it to this day. It was imperative then for a 'Fella' to take a degree in law or medicine, and dear old Routh

suggested I should go to Edinburgh and take my M.D. there.

I went to try my luck, but one dose of the dissecting-room was enough.

When I saw the beastly sawbones cutting up a poor wench like a pig, I staggered out of the slaughterhouse and fainted in the passage.

There was nothing for it now but the law.

For the first twelve months I was compelled to be in residence at Maudlen, but as soon as I was at liberty I bolted to town, where Compton was already settled. The dear old chap met me at the coach office, took rooms for me in Norfolk Street, stood early dinner at the Hummums, and took me to Old Drury to see Macready in Macbeth! My God! What a revelation. I shall never forget that wonderful performance to my dying day.

The following night we went to the Haymarket, where we saw Mrs Nisbett as Lady Teazle, William Farren as Sir Peter, Mrs Glover as Candour, Strickland as Sir Oliver, John Cooper as Joseph, Jim Wallack as Charles, Harley and Meadows as Sir Benjamin and Crabtree, and Webster as Moses—there was a cast for you!

Next day I entered my name at Lincoln's Inn, ate my dinners in due course, chummed with my cousin Charles Faber (a right down good fellow), read with Sam Warren (Tittlebat Titmouse Warren). But we soon agreed to differ, and I moved over to Matthew Fortescue, a pal of Compton's, and then, to tell you the truth, dropped the law altogether until six years later, when I was called to the Bar, and ultimately became D.C.L."

CHAPTER III

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

Life in London—Man about Town—More stage-struck than ever —The great Players of the Period—The Mighty "Mac"—Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and the Haymarket—Aspasia—"The Fair, the Chaste, the Inexpressive She"—Studies "the greatest of all the Arts," steps from the Sublime to the Ludicrous, and goes into Business as a Fiddler—Vacation Visits to Scotland — The Waverley Country—Bonnie Edinburgh—The Old Theatre at the Foot of the North Bridge—William Murray's matchless Company—The Mad Sailor in the Pit—Life at Newhaven — Lord Ipsden, Christie Johnstone, and her Forbears — The little Rift within the Lute — Crossing the Tweed — Home-coming—His Fiddles get him into Trouble again at Ipsden — Ignominious Dismissal — Goes on the Continent to France and Switzerland — After Continental Tour — Returns Home for Shooting—Killing the Fatted Calf

"NOTWITHSTANDING the machinations of my enemies at Maudlen, my Fellaship and my income were assured, and having nothing to do, and, to perpetrate an Irishism, plenty of time to do it in, I pitched my tent in London.

You would scarcely believe it that, despite my limited income, I was one of the most stylish young men about town in those days. After an early breakfast, and two or three hours' desultory reading, the morning found me lounging down Bond Street or the shady side of Pall Mall; the afternoon outside a horse (a hired one) in the Row, while every night, or every other night, was passed in the theatre.

Even during this short spell of apparent indolence I had one fixed purpose—to be a dramatist.

I am even more convinced now than I was then that the drama in its highest form of development is the queen of all the arts, inasmuch as it combines them all in one cohesive and harmonious whole. Hence it was that I steadily devoted myself day and night to perfecting myself in the grammar of the stage.

It was a fortunate time for me to learn my business, including, as it did, the whole of Macready's memorable management at Covent Garden, 1837-38, and at Drury Lane, 1841-43.

I don't believe that, even in 'the palmy days' about which so much rot has been spoken and written, anything ever approached the general excellence of Macready's productions, and I am quite sure there never has been anything like it since. Don't imagine I seek to depreciate the excellence of to-day. *Au contraire*, I have the highest appreciation for it; but "Palmam qui meruit ferat!" and I should be barbarous and ungrateful were I to forget what I owe that great man and his contemporaries.

Some of the performances given by Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris at Covent Garden were of the very highest order—notably, Sheridan Knowles' play "Love," Shakespeare's "Love's Labour's Lost," and "London Assurance" (which I saw the first night) were all most admirably done.

I sha'n't discuss the merits of the play (although they are considerable), but when I read of airy young gentlemen, who know as much of the technique of the drama as my boots, affirming that comedy has never been acted, never mounted until now, I simply say, "Go away, ignorami! go away and learn your alphabet!"

Of course Covent Garden was too big for this play (it ought to have been done at the Haymarket!), but there never has been a scene on any

stage in my time which could possibly compare with the garden scene in front of Max Harkaway's house in this production, while as for the acting—well, there is the cast to speak for itself.

Some of the best performances I have ever seen were given at the little house in the Haymarket, where I saw, in one season, Macready, Charles Kean, James Wallack, Phelps, Tyrone Power, Webster, Strickland, Wrench, Charles Mathews, Howe, Tom Stuart, and William Farren "The Cock Salmon"; Helen Faucit, Ellen Tree, Mrs Warner, Mrs Nisbett, Madame Vestris, Miss P. Horton, and Mrs Glover!

'Think of that, Master Brooke!' Doesn't it take your breath away?

At this very time the Keeleys were at the Lyceum with a very fine company, and soon afterwards they joined forces with Charles Kean at the Princess's, when the "Winter's Tale," "Richard II.," "Henry V.," and "Henry VIII." were splendidly decorated, although the cast could not compare with Macready's. The same remark may apply to Phelps's admirable and, indeed, amazing work, which attracted all the educated world to a wretched, tumble-down theatre in a remote suburb.

I learnt all I know of dramatic art from these great artists, and cannot be too thankful that I was privileged to see them at their zenith. Many of them I was so fortunate as to know hereafter. Indeed, I may say I knew them all, save the greatest. To me, at all times, Macready was

> "Like a comet, to be wondered at but
> Not to be approached!"

In those days I was a Pitite, and appreciated the play all the more because I paid for the enjoyment; and when I didn't enjoy it, I enjoyed the privilege of speaking my mind.

The Haymarket, apart from its central position, was my favourite theatre. I could see and hear there better than anywhere else—then they always

had the best comedy company in London, and when they tragedised they had the pick of the patent theatres.

One night, in the summer of 1837, the play was "The Bridal," adapted by Macready and Sheridan Knowles from "The Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher. Macready was at his best in Melantius—and when at his best no one came within measurable distance of the 'mighty Mac.'

Haines, a popular minor theatre dramatist of the period (author of "My Poll and my Partner Joe" —a rattling nautical piece which I saw at the Surrey with T. P. Cooke as the hero), and a deuced good actor, played the wicked King Arcanes. Little Elton was the Amintor, and the stately and majestic Mrs Warner (or was she Miss Huddart then?) was the Evadne, while Miss Taylor, the charming Helen of "The Hunchback" (afterwards Walter Lacy's wife), was usually the Aspasia. On this occasion, however, being indisposed, a young lady whom I had never seen before, a Miss Alison, took her place. Of course, you know the play?"

("*Rather! I've acted Melantius.*")

"Well, then, you know Aspasia, who has been jilted by Amintor, is still in love with the fella, and disguises herself as a page to attend upon him."

("*I remember.*")

"As usual, I sat in the front row of the pit. I shall never forget the impression that Aspasia's first appearance as the page made on me. To say that she was beautiful would give but the faintest idea of the charm of her personality. Her so-called disguise served, not to conceal, but to reveal in all its beauty the glowing outlines of that graceful form.

Although so perfectly proportioned, she was a leetle—yes, just a leetle below the middle height. Her complexion was fair, her face oval, her nose a delicate aquiline, with almost transparent nostrils, her lips twin cherries, her teeth of dazzling white-

ness, her eyes large and lustrous; her neck and shoulders and her limbs, above and below, were superbly moulded, while her voice melted into music at every utterance.

Remember, I'm speaking of more than twenty years ago, when I was as susceptible as this dainty creature was attractive.

What is it Knowles says in one of his high-falutin' rhodomontades? "In joining contrasts lieth love's delights."

And so I suppose it came to pass that I, a great hulking six-footer, had no eyes for anyone that night but that seductive, alluring little Ganymede.

> "It is the very error of the moon:
> She comes more near the earth than she was wont
> And makes men mad!"

I verily believe, could I have got at that charming creature that night, I should have flopped upon my knees and have besought her to come and get spliced there and then.

Had she been weak enough to assent, a pretty kettle of fish we should have made of it. I should have forfeited my Fellaship, and we should have been a pair of paupers and, probably (since the Reades are a prolific race), the propagators of a race of paupers!

Fortunately, however, I did not meet her. I saw her, however, every night after that, till the end of the season, when she disappeared like a flash of lightning.

I disappeared too.

From the time I had read "The Lady of the Lake," "Rob Roy," and "Waverley," the land of the mountain and "the flood" had an irresistible attraction for me. I had no friends or acquaintances in Scotland, but one of my Oxford chums gave me an introduction to his people in the Highlands, and I had the pleasure of tramping over

every inch of Rob Roy's country, with the young laird, who was himself a lineal descendant of the gallant cateran. From the Highlands I went to Edinburgh, where I made holiday regularly afterwards for two or three consecutive summers, roaming up hill and down dale, over the lakes and through the Caledonian Canal, always returning with redoubled zeal to the Canongate, Holyrood, the Castle, the Calton Hill, and Arthur's Seat, while every night found me ensconced in the front row of the pit at the Theatre Royal.

When the company migrated during the summer to the Adelphi at the head of Leith Walk, I followed.

("*I remember! It was* then *I first saw you—you and your flannels and your straw hat.*")

Yes; and it was then, you young villain, that you fellas christened me "The Mad Sailor." Ah! Well, I suppose I was a little erratic in those days.

What a splendid company you had! Edmund Glover, Wyndham (Handsome Bob!), William Howard, Maynard, Lloyd, Ray, Bedford, Melrose, Reynolds, George Honey, Leigh Murray, and Mackay, Mrs Leigh Murray, the beautiful Julia St George, that dainty little duck Clara Tellett, Miss Cleaver, and Miss Nicoll. The leader of the orchestra was Mackenzie, a capital fiddler, and father of Alexander Mackenzie of that ilk.

Then there was Murray himself.

What a comedian!—one of the best, if not the very best I ever saw.

I had for my half-crown (or was it three shillings?), none of your beastly runs, where the actors get stodgy and stupid, the actresses inane and inarticulate, but a new play every other night, with every function of mind and body quickened into activity—aflame with intellectual fire!

I knew no one—not a living soul in Auld Reekie—save the actors and actresses, to whom I never spoke then, but whom I seem, after the lapse of all these years, to recall as the dear friends and companions of my lonely youth.

It was during one of these vacations that I drifted down to Newhaven, and became acquainted with Christie Johnstone and her belongings.

Yes, sir! I was the Ipsden of the story, and Christie, dear Christie, was——but that concerns no one but my darling and myself!

During one of these excursions I was tempted to go into the herring trade. (I was always prone to speculate!) Bad sailor as I was, I more than once went out all night with my crew.

When day broke we were always ravenous, and broke fast with scores of herring broiled, with scones, oatcake, and butter, and coffee to follow.

Were herring the dearest in price, the gourmand would pronounce the silver-sided little beggar the most delicious fish that swims the sea. Those who have never tasted him, fresh from the net, broiled over the brazier, don't know what the taste, the delicious taste, means.

When Christie and I agreed to differ (alas! that it should be so), I shook the dust of Scotland from my feet, and it was many a long day ere I crossed the Tweed again.

You mustn't suppose that I was all this time merely sight-seeing, play-going, philandering, and herring-fishing. All the time I was still preparing for my profession as a playwright. I wrote plays—but could get no one to look at 'em—and yet God only knows how precious a little sympathy would have been at that time.

When I got back to town after the tiff at Newhaven the theatres were closed, so I went down to Maudlen. The long vacation was on, and no one there except the players, but that £30 for "Peregrine Pickle" was a caution. I severely kept away and went down to Ipsden, where my reception was arctic; the stern parents having arrived at the conclusion that I had wasted my opportunities, and that there was little prospect of their young hopeful becoming a bishop.

Oxford a desert—Ipsden an ice-house—Edinburgh

impossible, I concluded to return to town although it was almost empty.

The foreign restaurants in Soho, their salads, their omelettes, their savoury messes, and their *habitués*, attracted me because of their economy, and interested me because of their novelty. One night, while dining at the Casque d'Or, I rubbed shoulders with a bright little Frenchman, who spoke English fluently, and who I found to be as great a theatrical maniac as myself.

He had been mixed up in some conspiracy (I shrewdly suspect it was in connection with Fieschi and the infernal machine), but the little beggar had an engaging manner, a facile tongue, and a ready wit; so I invited him to come and take tea with me, and very pleasant company I found him over tea and toast and an occasional muffin.

Henri (that was his name, or at anyrate the name he took) was a fiddle-maker by profession. He played beautifully, made fiddles, repaired them, could tell at sight a Cremona from a Stradivarius, and knew the origin and ownership of nearly every fiddle in Europe. I showed him mine, told him it cost me twenty guineas. "Worth two hundred," he said. "Belonged at one time to Paganini himself. Listen!" With that, he unstrung three strings, played a fantasia on the Carnival of Venice on one, and won my heart!

He wanted financing, I wanted a fad, and we went into partnership. He was willing to teach, and I was anxious to learn, and devoted myself heart and soul to the business. We began to import old fiddles from abroad, expecting to coin money out of them.

After a few months business seemed promising, when lo! an imperative mandate from Madame Mère requiring my immediate presence at Ipsden.

We were just then engaged in some interesting experiments in compounding a delicate tint for staining and varnishing our fiddles. It was my hobby — Henri left this department to me, so I

concluded to take three or four fiddles and my varnishing stuff with me and continue my experiments at Ipsden.

Although riled with me herself, the mater couldn't bear anyone else to be angry with her "Baby," as she called me, and, angry or not, she never lost sight of my interests.

Now she had got a straight tip from her friends MacBride and Ellerslie, that a valuable bit of preferment had turned up at Maudlen in the shape of the Vinerian law scholarship, and she resolved that I should have it.

This plum depended upon the votes of the Masters of Arts, and as a rule was "a put-up job," managed with closed doors, by the *resident* masters. Mother knew, however, that the *non*-residents formed the great majority, so what does my lady do but take out her carriage and pair, and canvass each and every one of the non-residents in Berks and Oxon, hence, those who had their own carriages swarmed into the City to vote for their old friend's son, while the mater provided carriages for those who had no conveyances of their own, with the result that I was returned in triumph at the head of the poll.

The Squire had taken the precaution to invite all our friends to a jolly good dinner, after which we drove to Ipsden, where I remained for some time on my best behaviour, continuing, on the quiet, my colouring experiments in my bedroom in the front part of the house, which, by the way, had just had a coat of white lead from top to bottom, pricked out with marble. I had never seen the old place look so spruce before.

One bright morning the sun rose at six, and I rose with it and let drive at my beloved fiddles with amber and copal and all the rest of my wonderful compound. Then opening the windows, I left them on the sills baking in the sun, while I adjourned to the matutinal tub.

When I got down to breakfast the mater was

more than usually pleasant, but the Squire who was coming up the broad walk let out a yell. I rushed out, enquiring "What's the matter, sir?"

"Matter!" he roared. "Look there! That's what's the matter!"

Looking up, to my horror I beheld my luckless fiddles. Instead of baking in the sun, as I had anticipated, the infernal stuff had melted like butter and streamed down the front of the house, defiling it with all kinds of hideous abominations in all the colours of the rainbow!

When angered, the Squire had a copious and florid vocabulary, and he "went" for me all he knew. I knew better than to answer him, so, I packed up my stock-in-trade, bade mother good-bye, and once more departed in disgrace.

To make matters pleasanter, I had not only not obtained the requisite tint, but had actually spoiled two or three fiddles into the bargain, which didn't tend to promote friendly relations between me and my partner.

When the friction had become almost unendurable, I met young Morris (the son of Webster's predecessor at the Haymarket) at the Café de l'Europe where I had dropped in for a cup of coffee. After this we met nearly every night at the theatre and had become rather chummy, so when he told me he was going *en garçon* to France and Switzerland for a couple of months, I made up my mind to join him.

Why he took us round by Havre instead of going by Calais or Boulogne I haven't the most distant idea.

I'm a villainously bad sailor, and had an awful passage, but on reaching *terra firma* I soon pulled myself together, and off we started for Paris by diligence. Railways were in their infancy at home, and had scarcely started abroad, and we were nearly twenty-four hours in getting from Havre to Paris—we can get there in three now.

The only notable object we caught sight of in

our journey (and that was only a passing glimpse) was the Cathedral Church of Rouen—a noble edifice, truly.

I should like to have explored the city to ascertain whether Joan was burnt alive, and, if so, who cremated the poor dear—French bishops or British barbarians—or was she cremated at all?

An ingenious Frenchman has recently written a book, proving to his own satisfaction that she escaped, married, had a numerous family, and died in the odour of sanctity at Domremy.

All our traditions are going by the board! The Countess of Desmond, and Bulwer between them have both deprived poor Richard of his hump (how would Charley Kean get on without that, I should like to know?); and when I reached Switzerland a learned German assured me that William Tell, Albert, and the apple were pure myths!

I can't bear to be disillusioned thus. No! give me King Dick with his hump and his bandy legs, and Joan—dear old Joan!—with her bonfire, and Tell with his bow and arrow, his Albert and his apple—above all, with his Macready!

The longest day must have an end, and at length we got to Paris.

I wasn't so much impressed with the gay city as I expected to be. The Tuileries, the Louvre, the Luxembourg, the Palais de Justice, the Invalides, and the Palais Royale were interesting; the boulevards were full of life and animation at night and quite a novelty to me. Versailles, stupendous but empty and funereal (the brutes wouldn't let me see the pictures!); Notre Dame disappointing, dull, and depressing.

The theatres were as shabby and dilapidated as our own old dust-holes, and, *entre nous*, I was not knocked all of a heap with the acting. I had heard two or three travelled monkeys in Oxford say, "Wait till you see Frederick, Boccage, De Launay, Fargeuil, Favart, Marie Laurent, Madeline Brohan, and Rachel!"

Well, I did see them—saw them under difficulties, I admit, because at that time I was not phonetically familiar with the language.*

I made a study, however, of "Ruy Blas" before going to see "Frederick," and, tell it not in Gath! the young actor who played Don Cæsar knocked the great man into a cocked hat. But then Ruy Blas is five-and-twenty, and "Frederick" was five-and-fifty if a day, and looked it! But see him in Robert Macaire! He is superb—unapproachable in this sublime piece of buffoonery.

Rachel, whose acting (apart from the absurd traditions of the French stage) more nearly approaches the methods of the best English actresses, might perhaps stand beside Mrs Warner in Lady Macbeth were it not for the Englishwoman's magnificent presence, but she couldn't hold a candle to Helen Faucit in Juliet and Rosalind.

I saw the great little woman in Phèdre, which she galvanised into life by the fire of her genius, but oh—oh! M. Racine, what a rattling up of dry bones over the frustrated fornication of Phèdre! After I had seen it I wanted "an ounce of civet to sweeten my imagination."

I tried to sit out Monte Cristo, but couldn't! Of course you know it took three nights—but one dose sufficed for me.

The most interesting thing I saw was Dumas's play "The Lady of Belle Isle," which I had also taken the precaution to interpret with the aid of a dictionary. To make assurance doubly sure, I followed the players with my book.

The play was most interesting, and, I thought, admirably acted. The great centre of interest, however, was the renowned Mademoiselle Mars,

* "My attempts at speaking French are said, by those who delight in remote analogies, to resemble the convulsive efforts of a chimney-sweeper to swarm up a fresh soaped pole to that joint of mutton which he never attains.

"At the bath last night I asked for a comb; the attendant nodded assent—and brought me an egg!"—*Letter to his brother William.*

who, you will doubtless remember, was said to have been one of the numerous *chères amies* of the little Corporal. If it were so, I admire the little bla'guard's taste and envy his good fortune.

This wonderful woman had, so it was said, turned threescore and ten, yet Morris assured me that only a short time previous to our visit she had actually played with acceptance and enthusiasm an *ingenue* of seventeen! Had I not been told otherwise, I should have taken her for a superb creature of thirty. I thought her adorable; but her art was more adorable still. She would have inspired a statue.

How I envied the fellow that played "Daubigné"!*

The heat in Paris was so oppressive that we only stayed about three weeks, then Morris began humming—

"Am not I—Am not I
A merry Swiss Boy?—
Then Hey! To the mountains away!"

We were three days—three whole days and

* Apropos of the lady who appears to have made so vivid an impression on the ever-susceptible Reade, Arsene Houssaye, in his delightful recollections of his management of the National Theatre, relates an anecdote so piquant that I venture to quote it here.

In the days of the Lower Empire, poor Mademoiselle Mars had fallen on bad times.

Now, whatever were the bad qualities of Napoleon Le Petit, lack of generosity was not one of them. Hence, besides providing for the immediate necessities of his uncle's old friend, an Imperial Edict was issued, according her a benefit at the Français, which brought her into frequent contact with the manager.

Thinking to improve the occasion by a little playful badinage, Houssaye, with somewhat dubious taste, inquired, apropos of her alleged intimacy with the Little Corporal:

"Mademoiselle, I have been told Monsieur Talma was wont to say that when you called at the Tuileries to make your adieux to the Emperor on the eve of his departure for Russia His Majesty was so engrossed studying the map of Europe that he searce bestowed a word on you."

"No such thing, Monsieur!—'tis a vile calumny!" exclaimed the indignant old lady. "The adorable creature was engrossed in studying *Me!—I* was *his map of Europe!*"

nights getting to Geneva. Talk of the heat in Paris! We had rushed out of the frying-pan into the fire.

We rode in the diligence without coat, vest, or neck-cloth, and if there hadn't been women in the *coupé*, I should have been tempted to have dispensed with my pantaloons!

Thank God! at last we came to anchor at Rufenacht's hotel in Geneva, where we slept without blankets, and with the windows (which were like folding-doors) wide open all night.

When the heat subsided before the cool breezes of the lakes and the breath of the snow-topped mountains, we had a high old time of it. Such life, such animation, such geniality, such gaiety! We have nothing like it in our own dear, stuck-up, old country.

Then such appetites! Not that I ever needed any incentive in that direction.

I am a pagan—always was—love everything lovely in nature, or art either, and thoroughly enjoyed myself.

We were like two big schoolboys out for the holidays. We did what we liked, dressed as we liked, ate what we liked, drank what we liked—and did not care the decimal part of a——duck's egg for Mother Grundy and all her beastly brood!

When tired with climbing up the Mauvaise Langue or the Dent du Midi, we bathed *in puris naturalibus* at the first convenient lake; when we couldn't do that, we tubbed at the Baths; and when the old woman asked us whether we took it with "Garnish" or without, we — but I forget! *That* Charles Reade was a young man (would he were young now!) — *this* is an old one, and "an old man will still be talking" of his youth.

Ah me! why can't we be always young?

August came all too soon; then, not having the purse of Fortunatus, we had to turn our thoughts homeward.

For twelve months I had been banished from

Ipsden, and had made up my mind never to darken the doors of the Manor-house again, until the Squire had taken back some of his hard words. Mother had written over and over again—more especially at Christmas—urging the return of the wanderer but I had remained obdurate.

Recently letters had passed and repassed. I had written elaborate descriptions of Paris and Geneva, the Mater had responded with good advice, and, better still, with a banker's draft to help cover the expenses of the outlay. I was touched by her entreaties, and—shall I confess it? sneak that I was! still more by the approach of the shooting season.

Then brother Bill, who had been round the world, and whom I had not seen for ages, had come home, from whence he wrote me a private and confidential communication, that the birds were strong on the wing, and that one day the Squire, in broaching the second bottle after dinner, had let out in a genial mood, "I hope that foolish boy of mine will be in time for the birds, and that he will leave that infernal fiddle behind him."

That determined me, and I wrote the Mater that I had magnanimously resolved to forget and forgive, and I also wrote the governor a long letter about my travels, winding up by saying he might expect me in time to pay my devoirs before the shrine of Saint September.

I was glad to find myself once more in Mother's arms. The Squire received me as if nothing had happened. Bill and I went out with our old keeper Johnson to astonish the birds, and that night the fatted calf was killed to welcome the return of the prodigal—but, I fear, impenitent fiddler."

CHAPTER IV

THE DEAN OF ARTS, OXON

After the Shooting — Scotland re-visited—Auld Reekie — *Eheu Fugaces!*—Retirement of William Murray — Lloyd at the Theatre Royal—Wyndham at the Adelphi — Glover at Glasgow — A last Look at Newhaven — Return to London — Debt and Difficulties — Mr Sloman — The Sponging-House—A Tragedy in a Nutshell—*En route* to the Marshalsea, when *deus ex machina!* — Head above Water—Dean of Arts — Honorary Degree of M.A., Cambridge—At Prince Albert's Installation as Chancellor—Outrage upon John Conington —Goldwin Smith and Griffith Gaunt

"THINGS were rosy enough while the shooting went on—but after?

Ipsden was, and always will be, beautiful, but it was not the Garden of Eden of old. The fact was, I had found a paradise elsewhere—a forbidden one, 'tis true, for the beastly stage-door barred my way to fame.

On the other hand, mother was still bent on my being a Bishop, and never ceased to urge upon me the importance of my being in permanent residence at Oxford. "Besides," said she, "look what it will save you! There's the common room, the senior common room, the run of the larder, and your magnificent chambers. And then you are always near home; and we're sure you are out of mischief."

It was idle for me to point out that the persistent hostility of my colleagues made residence at Alma Mater distasteful, if not impossible.

"Of course—of course!" rejoined mother. "The

Theatre—that pit of perdition—is your Alma Mater!"

Then father put in his spoke. "It's the fiddles, Maria, those cursed fiddles. To think that a son of mine should ever become a fiddler!"

I endured this perpetual nagging as well as I could; but was not sorry when brother Bill and his wife (Number Two) invited me to accompany them to Scotland, where they were going to look after their property.

"Caledonia stern and wild" has always been delightful to me, and Mrs Bill (a charming woman) had sympathised a little with me during those wearisome wiggings at Ipsden, and she made my visit a very pleasant one.

The best of friends, however, must part. My visit came to an end, and it was time to cross the Border.

Passing through Edinburgh, I couldn't resist the temptation, and stayed to look round. As I stood opposite the Abbotsford monument, glancing at the old town before me, with the Castle to my right, and the Calton to my left, I thought this pearl of cities had never looked so beautiful.

Then I strolled to the theatre at the foot of the North Bridge. Eheu! Murray had retired and gone to enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* at St Andrews. Lloyd was manager, Wyndham was in opposition at the Adelphi at the head of Leith Walk; Glover had gone to Glasgow; while Old Mackay still remained a hale and sturdy evergreen.

Leith! Suppose I were to stroll on to Newhaven —there could be no harm in my seeing—seeing *Her* —certainly not!

As I strolled down Leith Walk, a fine, buxom young hussy of a fishwife, balancing a huge basket on her head, strode up towards the city singing out "Caller haddie. Wha'll buy my fine caller haddie?"

How it all came back to me as though it were yesterday!

I wondered whether "She'd" be glad to see me. I should soon know, anyhow.

At last I reached Newhaven. When I approached the house the door was wide open; and the old woman was "ben."

"Christie," said I, "how's Christie?"

"God's truth!" and she dropped her knitting. "Div ye na ken?"

I shook my head. "Where is she?" I repeated.

"There!" and she pointed to the old kirkyard beyond.

I made my way there—and then——! Yes, then—I crawled back to Edinburgh.

I didn't go to the play that night. Had I done so "She" would have been by my side, as she had been many a time before!

I took the night mail to town, and next day returned to my fiddles.

Fiddles and tombstones! Well, the dance of death is always going on, but the grisly old beast twists his chords out of our heart-strings, and precious discords he makes of 'em!

Being a genius, Henri had by no means a commercial mind. He made bargains, 'tis true, but I had to pay for 'em, and, consequently, was frequently involved in debt and difficulties.

While struggling to keep the pot boiling we nearly came to grief through the stupidity and cupidity of the custom-house officials at Southampton, who laid a scandalous embargo upon a valuable consignment of fiddles from Holland.

I memorialised the Lords of the Treasury about this business, but the blockheads took no heed of my appeal for justice. Consequently, I had to borrow money at usurious interest to keep going. As I couldn't meet my engagements, gentlemen of the bill-discounting fraternity began to squeeze me, there were writs and judgments, and I had to leave Oxford and lie *perdu*.

Just at this period came news of a discovery of a hoard of valuable violins in Paris. Henri and I were at London Bridge one Monday morning preparing to take the train for Dover, when enter

Mr Sloman and exit Charles Reade in a cab booked for Cursitor Street!

The sensation was a novel one, but it would all come in for my next play. Meanwhile, what was to be done!

'Twould cause a public scandal were the news known in Oxford, and I need expect no help from Ipsden to get me out of a hole in which fiddles had figured.

There was only one thing—to send for my brother Compton and take his advice.

His offices were in the neighbourhood, and in a few minutes he was with me. He opened fire with an awful wigging. Having thus unburthened his mind, he sent for Sloman (who was a decent old chap in his way), and arranged for me to have three days' grace before sending me to quod.

"You deserve it all and twice as much, you and your d—d fiddles!" growled Compton. "But there, there! don't look so down in the mouth! I'll see you through!"

"How?" I inquired.

"That's my business! By-by till Thursday," and off he went.

I had a bad time on Tuesday, for I knew the dear old chap had a large family and a hard fight to make both ends meet, and the thought of involving him in my difficulties was not to be endured.

Wednesday I got over more pleasantly, for my companions in captivity were for the most part gentlemen, and more or less interesting in their somewhat unique experiences.

As a matter of detail, I may remark that, according to custom, I had to pay my footing in a magnum of champagne.

One handsome young swell (a right honourable with an historic name, a lord by courtesy, and the next, but one, in succession to a dukedom) was the life and soul of the company, and kept us in a roar till bedtime, which, by-the-by, wasn't till past two in the morning.

Upon getting up, I inquired anxiously for a letter. When I found none my heart sank into my boots.

Returning through the waiting-room, I saw the handsome youngster of the night before and a tall distinguished girl of twenty or one-and-twenty, with a pale face and large dark eyes. She was in the act of putting a flower in his button-hole. His arms were folded tightly on his chest, his face rigid and pale as death, his eyes aflame yet fixed on something far away.

I never forgot that picture—never shall to my dying day!

I had barely got to the end of the passage when I heard two shots fired in rapid succession. Rushing back I found the boy and the girl both dead and lying clasped in each other's arms. On the table lay a hasty scrawl: "Send to my father and tell him I hope he is satisfied now. Tell mother to pay my debts and see that we are buried together!"

Strange to say, even amidst these horrors, the dramatic significance of the incident struck me. Stranger still, I have never utilised it from that day to this.

The catastrophe fell like a pall upon the house—no more cards, no more funny stories, no more laughter that day. To enhance the horror of the situation, the dead boy and girl lay in the next room to mine, awaiting the inquest on the morrow.

As hour succeeded hour, and Compton didn't turn up, my agitation increased. Before we turned in to roost, Sloman came and said, "Twelve o'clock to-morrow, sir — the Marshalsea — and I shall have to trouble you for my little bill before you go."

I didn't sleep a wink that night, and when I got down in the morning and found no letter, I couldn't look at my breakfast.

The inquest was fixed for one o'clock. Fortun-

ately, I should escape that, for, even if my brother didn't turn up, I was bound to clear out for the Marshalsea at twelve.

Alas! when twelve came there was still no sign of Compton.

Sloman wanted his bill; I had no money, so had to leave my gold repeater, a birthday gift from sister Julia. I was just stepping into the cab, with the tipstaff, when up rolled a hansom and out jumped dear old Compton, who paid the money, redeemed my repeater—and I was free!

I wanted to hug him, he wanted to hug me, but Englishmen ain't built that way. I merely said, "You're a brick, old chap." He responded, "You're another."

We shook hands and went to lunch at Vereys', and made a real good one.

"How did you work the oracle?" I inquired.

"The Mater. She has sent you this besides," and he handed me a Bank of England note for £20.

"How did she take it?"

"Well, she bullied me awfully—declared it was all my fault, and that I ought to have kept you out of it. When I ventured to inquire, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' she rounded on me like a tigress. 'Don't blaspheme, sir! Don't dare! As for that wretched boy, let him go to prison; let him stay there and starve there and—good heavens!—here comes your father. Not a word to him—not a syllable, on your life—he'd never forgive my poor Baby.'"

"And the Squire?"

"Oh, when he came in he let fly about the Repeal of the Corn Laws—he has got 'em on the brain! He's death on Peel, and would hang Cobden and Bright without judge or jury. He softened down a bit after dinner, and when he had polished off his bottle of port, and adjourned to the arm-chair for his usual forty winks, Nelly came in and beckoned me out. The mater was waiting in her own room, fixed as fate. 'Here's a cheque' she said. 'Get the wretch out of that dreadful place at once; and tell

him that if he doesn't turn over a new leaf I've done with him forever.'"

"Anxious as I was to obey the mater, I couldn't cut Henri adrift at once. I talked to him like a father, made him knife our expenses down to the last farthing, removed to cheaper lodgings at the back of Leicester Square, lived like an anchorite, kept regular hours, didn't smoke (filthy, beastly habit!), didn't drink, and—didn't get into debt! I worked like a nigger—no, they never work!—worked like a man; though, of course, I went to the play every other night. The nights I didn't go I stayed at home and wrote plays; while at intervals I paid periodical visits to Ipsden and Oxford."

Mother was the most delicate and high-minded of women, and never once reminded me of Sloman, and I never recurred to the subject until, after a couple of years of scrupulous economy, I walked over from Oxford one fine morning before breakfast, and put a packet of bank notes into her hand.

"Fasten the door!" she said. "Bolt it!"

Then she took out the notes and carefully counted them.

"Sure you can spare them?"

"Quite."

Then she put the notes in her desk and locked it. "Now unfasten the door and let's go down to breakfast."

That was one of the jolliest breakfasts I ever ate in my life. She was radiant, so was the Squire, for there had been a splendid harvest, and the fishing at our eyot on the Thames was first-rate.

After breakfast he said, "Come and have a day's fishing, Charlie."

Off we went and had a ripping day.

After a pleasant little holiday I got back to my plays and my fiddles. Fiddles were looking up—but plays nowhere. No one would look at 'em, beastly idiots!

I had been elected Probationer in 1835. It was now getting towards the end of 1844; and in 1845

the office of Dean of Arts, tenable for a year, fell to me in rotation.

I had been so wretched at Oxford that, though the refusal of the option would have debarred me the Vice-Presidency, I made up my mind that I would have none of it. Mother, however, wouldn't hear of my refusal; the Squire too was dead against it; so was brother Bill. My principal objection was that the appointment involved twelve months' residence.

"I can't stand that," said I. "Twelve months' residence among those fossils, those locusts and hornets, who stink as well as sting!"

"Don't be a fool!" retorted Bill. "Think of the honour of the thing. Besides, you'll be able to nominate a demy; and as for residence, I'll come and share your rooms."

Then mother had the last word (she always did have it!), and I took my option for 1845, but it wasn't a bed of roses, I can tell 'ee.

Dear old Routh, MacBride, and Ellerslie always received me with dignified politeness, if not with cordiality; but as for the other antediluvian duffers, though I made a martyr of myself by dining in the senior common room, though I tried to laugh at their ponderous jokes, and actually played whist with them, they held me at arm's-length.

I got on, however, with the boys, the Demys, and the Gentlemen Commoners; played cricket, skittles, and bowls, took an oar in their boats, taught 'em archery, and occasionally gave cosy little dinners in my own rooms to especially nice chaps.

Of course, I could neither drink nor smoke, but brother Bill could do both. In pursuance of his promise he stayed with me three or four weeks at a time, took care that my young friends had what they liked, and (it must be admitted) sometimes more than was good for them, which the proctors said was scandalous.

What would you? One can't please everybody, you know.

For my part, I grinned, and, like the big navigator whose little wife punched his head, I said to Bill, "It pleases them and don't hurt I."

On one of the little cosies aforesaid we had a remarkably fine hare which Bill had shot at Ipsden. We all had the voracious appetite of youth, and of course the back didn't go all round."

"Never mind, boys! I'll make it up next time," said I.

Hares were scarce that season, but a week later I persuaded Bill to go over to Ipsden and make a deal with Jack Slaughter, the local poacher (a great chum of mine!), and I went myself for a day's sport to the 'Varsity grounds at Tugden. Result—when we met next day, Bill and I had a dozen hares between us.

We sent one each to Routh, MacBride, Ellerslie, and Bernard Smith.

At our banquet a week later our guests (six Demys and Gentlemen Commoners) found each a whole hare before him. By Jove! what a Gargantuan roar went up, and what Gargantuan appetites we had.

When we had done with 'em there was not much of those hares left, I can tell 'ee.

During my term of office the nomination of a Demyship fell to me. Of course, if a member of our family or that of a friend had been eligible I should have nominated him like a shot, but I knew of no one.

Sir John Chandos-Reade of Shipton (who bumptiously arrogated to himself the title of the head of the Reades) evidently knew of some one, for he despatched a mandate, couched like an imperial ukase, requiring me to nominate a protégé of his!

(This pig-headed old duffer ultimately disinherited his own children, bequeathing the whole of his estate, real and personal, to a menial in his employment! Had the menial in question been his natural son I could have understood the position, but even idiots don't make flunkeys of their own flesh and blood!)

Next came an importunate communication from the son of that beast Scourger of Kettlebury, begging me to remember the many benefits I had received at the hands of his father. I *did* remember: indeed, I have never forgot 'em—never shall to my dying day.

As for the "head of the house," I informed that gentleman that, being young and inexperienced (I was thirty-four!), I had transferred the nomination to President Routh, who was much better adapted to form on opinion as to the qualifications of a candidate than I was.

I was not sorry to have an opportunity of snubbing my blubber-headed friend the baronet, and heartily glad to be able to offer Routh this slight acknowledgement of the many kindnesses I had received at his hands.

He had a good memory had John Martin, for soon afterwards, when Albert the Prince Consort was installed Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, the dear old chap nominated me to receive the honorary degree of M.A. of the sister university on that important occasion.

Just as I was about to terminate my tenure of office (I hope with credit to myself and the 'Varsity), an untoward accident occurred which embittered my relations for life with two very distinguished men.

Professor Goldwin Smith and his friend John Conington, who belonged to us, had attempted to inaugurate a debating society, when a handful of unmannerly young cubs, resenting this attempt to teach them political economy, ducked poor Conington under the college pump. Needless to say, had I been present I would have stood up for him as long as I had breath in my body; but the impression prevailed, and, I believe, does to this day, that, though I did not participate, I connived at this ruffianly outrage. Anyhow, Smith and his friend left Maudlen and went over to 'Varsity College, from whence the former migrated to Canada, and there has been feud between us from that day to this.

Of course you remember how the spiteful beggar went for "Griffith Gaunt," wrote a malignant libel on poor Griffith and on me in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and how I brought an action for slander and defamation of character?

To prove my case, I engaged George Vandenhoff, the tragedian, to read the book in open court to the jury. But malice is a bla'guard, and ignorance a wild beast, so the bla'guards and the beasts gave me a verdict for a farthing, without costs, and burked the very best book I ever wrote."

CHAPTER V

AT HOME AND ABROAD

Back at the little Village — Writes Volumes and Volumes of Notes and a Score of Plays at which no one will look or or listen to, save "Melancholy James," who suggests that "Christie Johnstone" shall be turned into a Burlesque, of which he (James) shall be the Heroine—Fiddles going to the Dogs—News of the Discovery of a Hoard of valuable Instruments in Paris—Reade and his Partner rush over and secure them—The Revolution of '48 bursts forth in Fire and Fury—The Citizen King bolts—But the Narrator is in the Thick of it—Reade, Henri, and Co. dissolve Partnership on the Summit of a Barricade in the Rue St Honoré—A Look in at the Legislative Assembly — Lamartine—The Duchess of Orleans and her little Boy—Cremation Coram Populo — Smuggled over the Barriers—Back in Safety—The Lord of the Manor rejoins his Ancestors

"I was glad to relinquish my Deanship at the end of '46, and still more glad to leave behind me the fossils of the senior common room, with their sludgy port, their syrupy madeira, their whist, their stale jokes and salacious stories, their sordid squabbles, and to feel myself once more in touch with life—not indeed the life to which I aspired, but still the life of the world, the life of men and women; not the living death—the petrifaction, and, I may add, the putrefaction, of the cloister.

Imbued with these views, I suppose I ought to have gone into Parliament, and done, or tried to do, something to make the world a little better than I found it; but, like the bird hypnotised by the basilisk, I was enthralled with the fatal fascination which had taken possession of me from boyhood,

so back I went to town, and the beastly but beautiful theatre.

Except my brother Compton and my cousin Faber, I had few acquaintances and no friends. Occasionally, indeed, I came across an actor or two of the second-class, and was wont to invite them to breakfast.

On these occasions I got up earlier than usual, and had two or three hours' spell at my plays before they came.

When they did come they were capital company. The beggars could talk—ye gods! how they could talk!—principally, it must be admitted, about themselves and their peaceful triumphs: how they had "knocked" the audience at Bullocksmithy, and electrified them at Stoke Pogis.

All the same, they talked about the play, the players, and the playhouse, and it was pleasant to listen; so I listened and learnt—I was always learning something. One of my especial favourites was Rogers, Jimmy Rogers, as he was called. I used to call him "Melancholy James" by way of variety.

He thought me mad, and I was sure he was. All the same, we got on capitally together, except when I read him my plays, and then he invariably went to sleep at the end of the first or second act.

At this period I had got Christie Johnstone on the brain, and had written a rattling play about her. I thought then, and think now, 'twas one of my best; but I couldn't get anyone else to think so.

When I read it to my melancholy friend he yawned and said, "Stunnin', dear boy! Stunnin' for a burlesque. Call it, 'Herrings and Rum; or the Chap who would and the Gal who wouldn't!' and let me play Christie, and there'll be barrels of money in it!"

"James," said I, "you're drunk!" (I always kept a bottle of gin for him, which generally disappeared during one of my readings.) "When sober you're an ass, when tight an idiot!"

"That's where I have the pull of you, dear boy.

I am sometimes rumbo, but you've always got a tile off. Never mind! you're a brick all the same; so, good-bye. God bless you till the next time."

And off he went, generally returning a week or fortnight later, as melancholy as usual, or more so.

Melancholy as he was off the stage, he was irresistibly funny on it.

Paris now became very attractive to me, and, much as I detested the sea, in the summer I kept my eye on the weather-chart, and, when the Channel was smooth, often slipped over to La Belle Lutetia.

Fortunately I had secured lodgings with a friendly barber who used to be at Truefit's in Bond Street. As I gave little trouble (a cup of coffee and a roll in the morning set me up till my *déjeuner à la fourchette*), I had only to drop a line beforehand, and my rooms were always ready at a reasonable price.

In one respect we are a hundred years behind the Parisian. In fine weather he lives in the open, and sits before a delightful café on the boulevards, where he is not obliged to swallow doses of liquid poison, but can enjoy himself like a reasonable being on a glass of lemonade, eau sucré, or a cup of coffee. Such coffee! We don't know how to make it here.

At these times the true Parisian is the most complaisant, delightful personage imaginable; but stir him up—rights of man, Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité! and behold the metempsychosis, ape and tiger rolled into a devil, as I had occasion to learn hereafter.

As yet I had not written a book, but I had studied hard; had taken notes enough to fill a hundred volumes.

In Paris my daily routine was tub, scrub, scribble, scribble for an hour or two, shave and hair dress at home, *déjeuner à la fourchette* at noon in a crémèrie. Then, hey! for pleasure and pictures!

The Salon, Louvre, Tuileries, Luxembourg. Antiquities and sights, Notre Dame, Museum, the Column Vendôme, Invalides, Hotel Cluny, Moulin

Rouge, The Gay Mabille, old bookstalls Quai Voltaire. (God of battles!) Char-à-banc to Versailles (where I did at last see the pictures), Fontainbleau, Malmaison, or St Cloud, with an occasional boat on the Seine.

Dinner (2 f. 75 c.), Palais Royale or Red Windmill, a cup of coffee on the boulevard. Café chantant in the Champs Elysée, or, joy of joys! the play! without being compelled to rush home and dress up like a waiter with a white choker!

There's an ideal programme for you! If one had only had a chum at that time!

What were you about that you were not born a score of years earlier. What splendid times we might have had together.

At the end of these delightful outings (always regulated by the state of the exchequer or the condition of the Channel), back to town, to Ipsden, and even to Oxford, which, beautiful as it was, had almost become hateful, thanks to the malignant hostility of my rivals.

I was always sure of a hearty welcome at Ipsden. Besides, there was cricket, boating, fishing, and shooting in season. But youth!—"beautiful, all golden, gentle youth,"—has always held a potent attraction for me, especially feminine youth. And now that I am getting old, I love the young more than ever! As long as I'm a man I hope I shall always be a boy!

There was little youth at Ipsden, so, despite the dearest of mothers, the best of fathers, after a time the old Manor-house became dull and wearisome. By day I missed the scrape of Henri's fiddles, by night the tuning-up of the orchestra, the sight of the green curtain, the smell of orange-peel, the murmur of the expectant pit, the rumbling of the gods, the women in the boxes with their bright eyes, their graciously-displayed charms—above all, the play! When the fit came upon me I used to send a line to my gyp at Oxford, arrange over-night with John Thomas the groom, up with the lark in the morning, pack my portmanteau, leave a hasty note with my adieux, get

outside a horse, gallop over to Oxford, and drop into my rooms for breakfast at nine o'clock.

It was a sense of duty alone which took me to the 'Varsity, but a little of the senior common room went a long way with me.

I always felt as if my illustrious (and imbecile) colleagues preferred my room to my company; so, after a week or so, maybe a month, back I went to my humble lodgings in the little village—back to my birds, my squirrels, my fiddles—my little Henri—my savoury messes in Soho — my happy hunting-ground in Bohemia—a Bohemia of clean linen and eau sucré.

True, I knew but few real Bohemians. Indeed, at that period an insuperable barrier arose 'twixt those gentlemen and yours truly — the barrier of clean linen, to which, candour constrains me to say, they were somewhat averse — while, *au contraire*, I always had a prejudice in favour of clean shirts—and plenty of 'em.

I was now thirty-six years of age, and had done nothing—nothing but learn to play the fiddle and to dance a hornpipe.

The thought began to haunt me. I used to lie awake o' nights and fancy myself dead and buried (strange idea that of the dual existence!), I saw myself lying in my coffin—saw myself buried at Ipsden—saw my tombstone—read the inscription:

Hic Jacet

CHARLES READE
D.C.L. Etc., Oxon.

Born 8th June 1814

Departed 30th June 1848

He played on the fiddle like an angel,
And danced a hornpipe like T. P. Cooke.

And of such is the Kingdom of Heaven!

I began to take the matter to heart.
For sixteen years I had been fooling and fiddling.

It was quite certain I should never be a Paganini or even an Alfred Mellon, yet must I be condemned for ever "to rub the hair of the horse against the bowels of the cat?" God forbid!

No, a time would come!

Yes, the time should come—when the pit would rise at me; when——

Enter Henri—among my plays and fiddles, my birds, my squirrels and castles in the air—at Castle Street, Leicester Square!

He was all alive—had just heard of a discovery—which in one grand coup would retrieve past losses and make our fortunes! 'Twas in Paris the treasure had been found!

The prospect was alluring—but how to raise the wind, that was the question?

I was cleaned out, and my cheque from the bursar was not due for ten days! We must temporise—negotiate, and gain time.

We did so—cheque came duly to hand. Next day we started for Paris—got there in safety this time, without let or hindrance from the bold Sloman.

M. Bertin, our correspondent, met us on our arrival took us to see the treasure-trove—a most valuable find. About thirty fiddles in all, begrimed with the dust and dirt of ages; some good, some bad, some indifferent, some of priceless value. So Henri said.

We made a good bargain; secured our stuff for an old song. Dined and wined our new acquaintance, and wound up at the Porte St Martin, where we saw a wild, mad melodrame which struck me.

Henri offered to call and get me a copy at Levy's in the morning, before meeting me at the station at two o'clock to catch the mail for Boulogne.

The morning came, so did two o'clock, but no Henri. Not seeing him, I strolled down towards Levy's to get the book of last night's play, when lo! as if by magic, the Revolution of '48 had leaped into life, and, instead of Henri, there came Hell! Yes, Hell! which burst forth from the centre like a

volcano, vomiting forth barricades, fire and flame, shot and shell, death and universal destruction.

All Paris had gone stark raving mad, with drink and devilry, lust and murder, rapine and spoliation; and here was I, an innocent, law-abiding Englishman, pitchforked—head-foremost—into the very thick of it.

The Citizen King knew his countrymen—he'd been in that line of business once before—didn't like it—didn't want to follow his uncle and aunt, his father and other relations to the Place de Greve.

No longer Citizen King, plain "Mr Smith" made a bolt of it, got safely to Twickenham, while I was stuck fast as a rat in a trap in the gay city. Gay! It was gay, with a vengeance!

I heard the yells of the murderers, the shrieks of their victims, the trumpet-calls, the rappel of the drum, the rattle of musketry, the roar of artillery! (I've been deaf ever since.)

Bobbing, to avoid a fusilade of arméd men who were potting everyone they came across in the Rue Rivoli, I turned into the Rue St Honoré. As I did so, I came full butt against Henri, at the head of a gang of ragamuffins armed with guns or pistols, knives or bludgeons, or anything they could catch hold of.

The little tiger had donned a blouse and a red cap. His eyes flamed like burning coals; evidently he had caught the blood fever too.

"Ha, la bonne heure!" he shouted, with a roar of laughter. "Regardez! I'm my own postman. Here's your precious play!" and he thrust it into my hand. "By-bye! Stick to the fiddles; they're a fortune. Get back to Leicester Square as quickly as you can. For me, I've waited for this for years—years. Thank God, I shall be in at the death. Adieu!" and he wrung my hand. "En avant, camarades! En avant!"

Then, rushing to the barricade at the end of the street, he leaped to the summit, waving his cap and shouting "Vive la Liberté! vive la République!"

The last word had scarcely left his lips when

bang! crash went a bullet through his head; and there was an end of Henri!

The barricade belched forth fire; houses on either side burst into flame; I turned away and bolted in the opposite direction, only to find myself engulfed in a great shrieking, shouting horde of homicidal maniacs, who bore me with them into the Legislative Assembly, where Lamartine, the Duchess of Orleans, and her little boy were evidently appealing to the collective wisdom of the nation.

What they said I could not distinguish, for the place was like a howling den of wild beasts.

Attracted, evidently, by peals of musketry, one section of the mob burst forth from the chamber, still dragging me with them, into an adjacent square, where a detachment of National Guards had been overpowered. How many were massacred I can't even guess, but I can answer for it that I saw—yes; saw with these eyes, three poor fellows burnt to death!

A fourth was about to be sacrificed, when a huge sans-culotte threw a ragged blouse over him, exclaiming, "Hold, hold, citizens! Lo! he is one of us—a brother!"

Then they sprang upon the guard, as if about to tear him limb from limb, instead of which they beslobbered and hugged him, bore him aloft on their shoulders, dancing a devil's dance to the diabolical music of the carmagnole while the other poor wretches were being roasted alive.

Enraged at my impotence to save or succour, I struggled out, staggered home, and besought my good landlord to find some means to enable me to get to Calais.

At nightfall he brought a friendly cocher and shoved me into the bottom of a huge fiacre, covered and half smothered me with straw, came with me himself, and smuggled me out beyond the barrier.

The rest was easy, and deuced glad I was, I can tell you, to see the white cliffs of Old England once more.

"*And the fiddles?*"

"Oh, I wrote and wrote, and got no answer. A few months later I went over, found the house in the Rue de Roche burnt down, and arrived at the conclusion that the fiddles had been destroyed with the house."

"*Then I suppose you retired from the business?*"

"Well, really the business retired from me. The firm of Reade, Henri, and Co. dissolved partnership at the Barricade on the Rue St Honoré."

Poor little Henri! Though a rabid Revolutionist, he was a rattling good fiddler!

As soon as I got back to town, I found a letter from the mater desiring my immediate presence at Ipsden.

To hear was to obey.

When I got to the Manor-house, Madame Mère was sad and subdued. No wonder.

"Charles," said she, "your father is breaking fast" —has been doing so for months past. I didn't like to tell you, because I thought he would get better, but I've lost all hope of that now. His health is gone, and he is subject to delusions.

He thinks we are ruined, and expects we shall be turned out of house and home.

'Tis in vain for me to assure him that there is no cause for anxiety. He says he knows better. I've proposed to send for William or Compton or Julia. 'No, no!' says he, 'I want Charley, my curly-headed ploughboy. Send for him at once, and tell him to bring his fiddle.'

"His fiddle!"

"Hush, hush! Humour him, humour him. Though he seemed stern and hard, you were always his favourite. You came late, dear, and you came last, and he loves you."

Then she led me to him in the garden, where we found him walking, and leaning on the arm of sister Elinor.

His hair had grown quite white, and was smooth as spun silk, his eyes had a fixed and vacant look,

but he pricked up his ears at the sound of our footsteps.

"It's my boy!" he said, "my curly-headed ploughboy come back to his old father!" Then he fell on my neck and wept, and the mater, "albeit unused to the melting mood," she wept too.

As for me, I had never seen either father or mother thus before, and it knocked me over altogether.

"The fiddle, Charley? Where's the fiddle?" he inquired.

"It will be here to-morrow, sir."

"Sir! Sir? Call me Father! Father! do you hear, *sir*?"

"Yes, Father!"

"That's right! Now, dinner, Maria—dinner, and then we'll talk about old times.

You remember when you were going to Bath for the waters, and we breeched him, the sturdy little beggar, and I drove him and Compton to Reading, and——Who's that? Well, the bailiffs won't come—they won't dare to come now, now that you are here, my son, my son."

The fiddle came, and I played and sang to him day by day, night after night, till it soothed him to sleep.

At first it afforded him pleasure, after a time he became impatient and querulous. "Put it away!" he said, "put it away!"

In a weak moment I suggested a game at cribbage. Cards were taboo at Ipsden; Mother had seen men of eminence wrecked and ruined by "the devil's books," and she loathed them. She objected, I persisted and persuaded, and at length prevailed. From that moment I knew no peace.

It was cards, cards, ever more cards—morning, noon, and night, for months and months!

Though She bore it like a Spartan, it was a terrible affliction for her to hear the

"big manly voice
Turning again to childish treble,"

and to feel that

"second childishness and mere oblivion"

were slowly but surely creeping on.

(Can the Bard have been prophetic? Must we *all* come to this, if we live long enough?

Then surely He himself, Mozart, Byron, Keats, and Shelley were happy in their exits.

As a child, when I read of the closing scenes of poor old George III., Swift, and Scott, they filled me with a shuddering terror; and even now, the pathetic horror of that last "Burke Sir Walter!" stabs me like a blow from a knife.)

Thank God! She was spared all but the pain of seeing the dear old dad gradually and painlessly fade away, until the end came, and he fell asleep with her hand clasped in his, and a smile upon his lips."

CHAPTER VI

VICE-PRESIDENT OF MAGDALEN

Tempering the Wind to the Shorn Lamb—Term of Office—Sweets and Bitters — Nominates his Nephew for Demyship — A Missive from Melancholy James — Introduction to Mrs Stirling, Tom Taylor, and the unfortunate "Christie Johnstone"—Out of Evil cometh Good—A little Dinner-party at Richmond—Installation as Vice-Chancellor of Maudlen—The Theatre opened at last—Production of "The Ladies' Battle" at the Olympic — Quasi Success — Origin of "Masks and Faces" — In Collaboration with Tom Taylor — Developments — Disappointments — Alterations and Rupture — "Masks and Faces" accepted at the Haymarket—Health breaks down—Tries the Hydro. at Malvern—Gully the Unapproachable and Omnipotent—Production of "Masks and Faces" at the Haymarket—Land at last

"ALTHOUGH Mother endeavoured to bear her bereavement with fortitude, the associations of half-a-century, during which they had never been parted, made the blow almost beyond endurance.

"You are all very good," she said, "but you are not him!"

By right of succession, Will was now lord of Ipsden Manor, but the dear old chap wouldn't hear of the Mater leaving the home over which she had ruled so wisely and so long.

All her surviving children were now grown men and women — all, indeed, except my sister Elinor and myself were fathers and mothers of men and women, some of whom had grown up in India, most of them at a distance. Sister and I were the only immediate connecting links with the past, and Nelly devoted her life to her mother, while I did

C. Silvy, Bayswater]

"MELANCHOLY JAMES"
"JEMMY" ROGERS

Photo by H. N. King, Bath]

MRS STIRLING

Photo by J. R. James, Islington]

LEIGH MURRAY

what little I could to alleviate sufferings which time alone could heal.

To this end I stayed at Ipsden for some months, assiduously devoting myself to her, and to my studies.

Just as I was about to give up all hope of ever passing the stage-door, at or about the end of August 1850, there came a letter from Melancholy James.

"Gentle shepherd," wrote the sad one, "cheer up for Chatham! The Gorgyus Stirling wants to hear about 'Christie.' Come up at once, and bring MS."

My stipend was due, and I had to go to Oxford to draw it! From thence it would be easy to run up to town; so I wrote James, inviting him to an early dinner next day at the Casque d'Or.

He was full of the subject. He had seen Mrs Stirling and "rubbed 'Christie' into her," and she had consented to see the author and hear the play.

He had a box for the Olympic, where they were doing a little play called "Time tries All," taken from a story in the *Family Herald*, by a Mr Courtenay, who had succeeded Douglas Jerrold as the stock playwright of the Surrey.

Of course you know the minor theatres of that period, like the players in "Gil Blas"—indeed, like the Italians of to-day—had their own "poet," permanently retained on the establishment at a weekly salary not of a munificent character.

"Time tries All" was an interesting trifle, very well acted. Mrs Stirling was the heroine Laura Leeson, while Leigh Murray was the hero (one Matthew Bates), and Sam Cowell (a famous droll of the period) was a low comedy cockney, pretending to be a Parisian.

When the play was over James escorted me behind the scenes and across the stage to Mrs Stirling's dressing-room.

It was the first time I had ever trod the stage, and what a thrill it sent through me.

The stage-manager was giving directions—car-

penters moving scenery—property men clearing away properties—gasmen stowing away lengths of lights.

As I gazed upon this busy beehive my heart swelled within me. I looked round in triumph, and was half disposed to cry aloud, "Behold your future lord and master!"

I was, however, brought to earth by James.

"Now, laddie, here you are. Buck up!"

The next moment I was in the sanctum sanctorum.

You who have only seen Fanny Stirling in her declining years can form no idea of what she was like when she first dawned on me in the full rich glow of ripe womanhood.

Above the middle height, an abundance of brown waving hair, a somewhat pronounced nose, sparkling eyes, luscious rosy lips, a bewitching smile, and—a mouthful of teeth like a young horse.

The riding-habit which she wore fitted like her skin, restraining with difficulty her "breast's superb abundance."

She was the beau-ideal of a Rubens woman before she begins to run to pod. There! you have her to a hair!

Evidently she and James were *bons camarades*, for she opened fire *sans cérémonie*.

"Well, Jimmy," said she, beaming, "so this is your friend from Oxford?"

"'M'yas, queen of my soul; the very identical flute!" responded James. "This blessed play of his is O.K., and has a rippin' part for you. He's come all the way to town to read it you. When is it to be?"

"To-morrow — at eleven — second floor — 27 Arundel Street. Excuse me. Glad to form your acquaintance, sir. Emily, the door."

Then she bowed us out like an empress; and it had all been done without my getting in a word edgeways.

James came to breakfast next morning, nine o'clock, after which he walked round to Arundel

Street with me. When we got to the door he said, "Here you are, gentle shepherd—good-bye, and good luck."

"Ain't you coming?" I inquired.

"Not if I know it, laddie. I've stood it once—and once is a dose for yours truly. So-long. Ta-ta." And he was off before I could reply.

My hostess stood the daylight even better than she stood the footlights, and looked charming whether by night or day. She gave me a very cordial welcome, and invited me to let fly at "Christie" at once.

Thus encouraged, I read the play with ardour—and actually impressed her.

She was most hospitable, invited me to lunch, and gave me a very good one — a salmon cutlet with cucumber, lamb chops and green peas, an omelette with apricot jam (you know my sweet tooth), and a bottle of sparkling Moselle.

She seemed to have acquired the knack of reaching a man's heart through his stomach. Anyhow, she reached mine, and we were friends and comrades before I left the house.

The play, she said, had capital points, a strong love interest; the comedy was comic, the scenic effect realistic and striking, the entire subject a novelty, but (here I trembled) it required revision — concentration. With my permission, she would submit it to her friend Mr Tom Taylor, the distinguished dramatist, and, in the event of his approval, would I object to his collaboration?

I jumped at the idea, left her the MS., and went away rejoicing in the assurance that she would take the earliest opportunity of consulting Mr Taylor, and acquaint me with the result.

A week elapsed—another—no news! Then I resolved to bell the cat. So I called at Arundel Street—more gracious reception than ever—lunch more delicious than ever—but she had been unable to get at Taylor, who had gone down to Sunderland to visit his people.

Another week—still no news. Called again—invited my lady to Richmond—lunched at the Star and Garter. A delightful day—too delightful—began too late and ended too soon.

Letter next morning from the Mater, wanting me home. Went at once, leaving my card of adieux at Arundel Street.

When I got back to Ipsden I found mother had returned to something like herself. Dr MacBride had been to see her, had called a second time, and insisted on driving her and Elinor over to Oxford, where Mrs MacBride put them up for the night.

Next morning the gentle Mac (who had always been the kindest of friends to me) took her to see Routh. Then the two dear old cronies opened fire on her; intimated that next year the option of Vice-Chancellorship of Maudlen came to me by rotation.

It was due to my father's memory—due to her—to myself, that I should accept the honour thus thrust upon me. There must be no nonsense; I must, willy-nilly, take it.

"Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."

It was literally thrust on me.

The position involved another twelve months' residence—another twelve months' daily, hourly contact with those who had tried to rob me of my fellowship, and to make Oxford too hot to hold me.

"Let the wretches see," said mother, "that they cannot drive you out; that you are one too many for them.

Besides, there's that Demyship. Julia's son, Allen Gardner, is eligible. He's a delightful boy, and will do you credit; and we must keep that place in the family. Then, my boy, there is that additional hundred pounds, your rooms and your living, which will cost you nothing. Whenever you want an outing I will send the carriage and

pair, and the drive home will do you good. Then William has promised to come over and stay with you every now and then."

Mother had her own way (she always did), and it was decided I should become Vice-Chancellor of Maudlen for 1851.

The position was one of distinction and dignity, and would have satisfied most reasonable men, but my mind was set on "Christie Johnstone" and her beautiful representative.

A short time prior to my installation there came a characteristic letter from Taylor, saying that he had read "Christie" with great interest; that it was full of strength, but (confound his buts!) unfitted for the stage. It would, however, make a splendid novel, and that I had better make a novel of it.

By the same post came a letter from Mrs Stirling, returning the MS., expressing her regret and her disappointment, hoping that we might do something hereafter, that she would always be glad to see me, etc.

On 2nd February 1851, I was installed as Vice-Chancellor. For a month—nay, more—for six whole weeks I sedulously devoted myself to my duties, that is to say, to quoits and skittles, archery, shooting and fishing and boating with the youngsters, beastly stodgy dinners with the fellas and the master in the commons room, when lo! a letter from Bertin, from whom I had bought that batch of fiddles in '48, informing me they had turned up safe and sound, stowed away in a cellar at the goods' station, and would be delivered to me upon personal application.

Off I went to Dover by first train. Fortunately the Channel was smooth as a mill-pond, and I crossed without turning a hair. Bertin met me on my arrival in Paris, took me to the station, introduced me to the goods'-manager, who transferred my beloved Cremonas and Stradivariuses to me at once. And, by the way, some of them turned out to be of considerable value; in fact, I sold *one* for twice as much as I gave for the whole boiling!

Decidedly I was in luck's way, for that very night (March 17th) was the *première* of a new comedy by Scribe and Legouve, entitled "Bataille des Dames."

After an early dinner at the Frères Provençaux with Bertin and the goods'-manager, off we went to the Français.

I was delighted with the play. Firstly, because of its merits; secondly, because there was a splendid part, the Countess d'Autreval, for Mrs Stirling.

No British brigands were present, so it occurred to me as an inspiration to play the bandit myself. Obtaining a copy of the play, I made my way back with my booty, and immediately set to work on the adaptation. I'm ashamed to say I never thought of paying Scribe or Legouvé, or even asking their permission to do the piece. It was so customary then to steal from our neighbours that all playwrights were thieves, and I merely followed the fashion.

It was only when I became an author myself that the scales fell from my eyes, the moral sense awoke, and I saw the abominable dishonesty of the thing. But that was not yet.

To translate is easy enough, with the aid of a dictionary—I believe many so-called playwrights of that period kept a ghost, who translated a piece, literally for a fiver;—but to adapt is a very different thing, as I speedily discovered.

It was a labour of love, however, and in about a week the job was done.

As soon as I could get a fair copy made, I wired to La Belle Stirling—I had a brand-new play from Paris, with a magnificent part for her, and I was coming up to read it to her.

I came, I read. She listened earnestly—was struck with it—again suggested collaboration with Taylor. "No," said I, "'too many cooks spoil the broth.' Scribe and Legouvé are good enough for me. Taylor and I can collaborate by-and-by."

She saw the reason of this, and pledged herself

to do the best she could with the cock salmon, old Farren. The difficulty was there was no part for him.

She suggested the desirability of Taylor and I becoming acquainted. I replied by suggesting a little dinner for the following Sunday at the Star and Garter. She was to appear the hostess, which would enable her to invite not only Taylor, but Louisa Howard (a very charming young actress), the two young Farrens, and Leigh Murray, for I had all of them in my mind for my play: Louisa Howard for Leonie, Henry Farren for Montrichard, young William for Henry, and Leigh Murray for De Grignon.

My fair friend was 'cute as a bag of monkeys.

"Not a word of this play to anyone at present. Leave me to pull the strings afterwards," said she.

Well, our little plot succeeded, and a very pleasant affair it was, the only drawback being the absence of young William, who was gallervanting elsewhere, and didn't turn up.

We were all favourably impressed with each other—Taylor and I especially—and it was there and then arranged that he should come down to Oxford and stay a day or two with me to discuss a project for collaborating in various subjects.

When we parted that night the fair but foxy Fanny whispered, "Louisa thinks you charming. But don't make yourself too agreeable in that quarter; Harry mayn't like it. And both he and Murray are most favourably impressed. As for the play, wait and you'll see."

When I returned to Oxford, Taylor came, according to promise, and stayed with me once or twice from Saturday to Monday, while I inundated him with my crude theories about art.

My views were ideal; his practical. He had written several plays with more or less success, and was a *persona grata* with managers. I was not, but I suggested an idea which had been seething in my mind from the first moment that I met

Mrs Stirling—Peg Woffington as the heroine of a play. I had fallen head-over-ears in love with my darling Peggy, and a little with the buxom Fanny. I thought them made for each other, as indeed they were.

I had written a fragment of the play, a scene or two, and gave it to Taylor to take to town.

He kept it ever so long, and sent it back with some notes. Then I sent it back to him; and so it went to and fro, but didn't "get any forrader."

Meanwhile he did me a good turn—got me made a member of the Garrick Club, a genial, but somewhat exclusive institution.

An anomalous one, too—originally founded, as you know, for the use of actors—it has steadily drifted away from its original purpose; and in my time it has never exceeded an average of a dozen actors and half-a-dozen authors, the residuum being old fogies, dilapidated dandies, and men about town. So exclusive has it become, that only the other day three of our most distinguished actors were "pilled."

It is, however, centrally situated, and I found it very convenient, especially during my enforced residence at Oxford.

My position as Vice-Chancellor rendered it difficult to get to town, except for a few hours now and then, and that was useless. I wrote Mrs Stirling, urging her to put on pressure, and try to get my hapless play produced before Christmas.

She did not answer my letter. I wrote again. She replied she had tried her hardest, to no avail.

I was incredulous, and wrote a reproachful letter. Next night, to my astonishment, my lady came down to Oxford, having got or taken a week's holiday, with the object, she said, rather scornfully, of seeing the institution which metamorphosed men into old women.

Of course I had to do the honours; to visit her at the hotel; and she returned the visit at my rooms.

A highly-popular actress at her zenith, stylish,

attractive, aggressive, dressed in the height of fashion, her advent at Oxford fluttered the dovecotes of Philistia; snobbery was rampant, and Mrs Grundy up in arms.

Some good-natured friend wrote to Ipsden that the Vice-Chancellor of Magdalen had been seen trotting about with a play-actress, and next day, just as my fair friend and I were sitting down to lunch in my rooms, the Chatelaine of Ipsden descended upon us. She did not wait for any introduction. It was the first and only time I ever knew the Mater to forget herself.

I must do the other lady the justice to say *she* did not—indeed, she never acted so well on the stage as she did on that occasion.

"You are his mother, madam, and he is my friend," she said. "Don't trouble, sir; you are needed here, and I am not. I can find my way."

I drove home with mother that night, and next day (Sunday) we went to church together. When she said "forgive us our trespasses," she clasped my hand. I returned the clasp, and from that time forth the incident was closed.

A fortnight later I had a letter from Henry Farren, intimating that, if the terms were eligible, my play would be produced at the Olympic. Would I kindly make a proposal, and also suggest my views about a title?

When Mrs Stirling left my room upon that memorable occasion I thought all was over with my poor play. Hence the news surprised me.

I was puzzled as to whether she meant to act the Countess or to throw it up. Without her the piece must inevitably be a failure, for there was absolutely no one who could take her place.

Suspense was intolerable, so I took the first train to London, drove to Arundel Street, and, walking straight to her room, put Farren's letter in her hand.

"What does it mean?" I inquired.

"It means—what it says."

"Then you know?"

"Know? Of course; I arranged it all."

"And you will play the Countess?"

"Who else, I should like to know? Who else will dare while I am in the theatre?"

"I am forgiven, then?"

"There is nothing to forgive. She is the sweetest, noblest old lady in the world. And you —yes, you—are the only one left her now; and she wants to keep you to herself."

"We are friends, then?"

"There's my hand! We mean to make the play a great success. It is cast already as you suggested. Go and see Harry. Don't open your mouth too widely about terms, or the affair will be off altogether. There!

"By Jove, you are adorable!"

"That'll do, sir, that'll do. Now off with you."

"The Ladies' Battle" was produced May 7th, 1851.

Of course, I needn't tell you that all the Moralities were written by the monks, and the first English play ("Gammer Gurton's Needle") by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and that most of the players and playwrights of Elizabethan times were 'Varsity men, that Dr Hoadley wrote "The Suspicious Husband," Young "The Revenge," Milman "Fazio," and Croly "Pride shall have a Fall"; but I believe this is the first case on record of a Vice-Chancellor of the 'Varsity having written and produced a play during his term of office; a circumstance of which I was not a little proud.

My duties at Oxford deterred me from attending rehearsals regularly, so the stage management devolved on Leigh Murray, who, though too robust and manly, distinguished himself highly as De Grignon.

The parts were all excellently acted, but Mrs Stirling was head and shoulders over everybody.

The public were appreciative, but not enthusiastic, and the critics (save the mark!) were, when not pessimistic, systematically hostile, as they have

always been to me; so I gained little kudos and less coin by my maiden effort.*

I had broken the ice, however, and Mrs Stirling's success as the Countess encouraged me to peg away at my darling Peggy.

During this time Taylor and I played a perpetual game at batttledore and shuttlecock. I wrote and sent my MS. to him; he cut and sent it back; and we didn't get "a bit forrader."

I nominated my nephew (darling Julia's son), Allen Gardner, for the Demyship, and he came off triumphant, which was highly satisfactory to mother, to Julia, and to me.

Although my old enemies were irreconcilable, the youngsters were all disposed to regret the end of my term when I returned to Ipsden.

That bit of a tussle about the Vice-Chancellorship and Allen's Demyship had stirred the Mater up and done her good. As for my poor play, I never referred to it. Perchance she never heard of it; at anyrate, if she did, she never mentioned it to me.

With the exception of an occasional visit to

* Although Reade gave nothing for this play, he got nothing or next to nothing, for it; and Tom Robertson, destined later to become one of the most eminent dramatists of the time, informed me, that in his early, struggling days he adapted this very play for Lacy the publisher for the modest honorarium of five pounds.

Other times, other manners!

After an interval of half-a-century, another version of this same play ("There's Many a Slip") has recently been produced at the Haymarket, and I dare be sworn that the adapter (a new and, it must be added, accomplished recruit to the army of letters) has received more coin in royalties in a month than Reade received from that theatre during the first dozen years of his literary life.

Half-a-century ago all authors were thieves, and I—I blush to own it—I was as great a thief as any of them. I must, however, plead in extenuation youth and ignorance. I was foremost in the van with my boyish adaptations of "The Robbers," "Monte Cristo," "The Musketeers," "Belphegor," "The Mother's Secret," "Three Red Men," "Father Paul," "Corsican Brothers," "Faust and Marguerite," "Valjean," "Katherine Howard," etc.

Oxford, I remained with her till April, when I made up my mind to have a spin in town.

After dinner, the night before I went away, she said, "Charles, I'm getting near the end of my journey. Oh yes, I know I am! There's some money" (a handsome sum secured under her marriage settlement) "coming to you at my death. It will be more useful to you now, and I think you'd better have it at once. Of course, you'll have to pay me the interest; but mind, no more fiddles or wild-cat speculations!"

This generous offer took my breath away, but it was a God-send, and I gratefully accepted it.

When I got to town I was received with open arms at the Olympic, and Taylor, who had moved down to Chiswick with his mother and brother, invited me to stay with them to get the Woffington play completed.

I really think there was more trouble, more labour, more worry in connection with this play than any other play that ever was written.

While Taylor was away at his office I wrote, and when he came back at night he cut. Then he wrote a bit, and I cut. It was snip, snap, slish, slash. We were both pugnacious. Taylor had the face and the pluck of a pugilist, and I fear I am built that way myself, so we rowed and rowed, fell out, and then fell in again.

We were both agreed that Mrs Stirling was to be our heroine. Having, like most of her sex, a modest opinion of her own capacity, of course she must needs have a finger in the pie.

"This was too weak, that too strong; this too short, that too long; this too comic, that too tragic."

When Taylor and I agreed to differ, she sided with him, which put my back up, then there were wars and rumours of wars.

He had approached Webster, who (subject to certain alterations) was willing to produce the play at the Haymarket, the theatre for which I had always designed it.

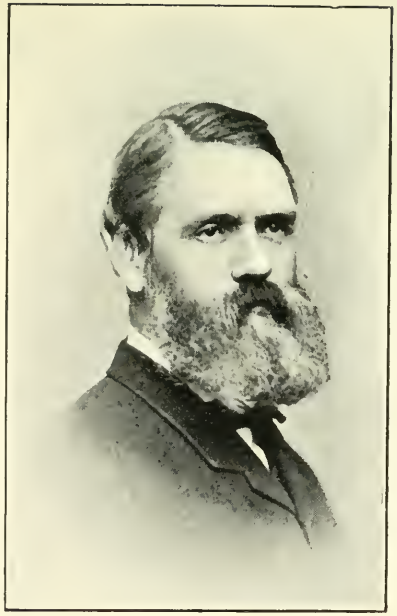


Photo by Elliot & Fry]

TOM TAYLOR

Photo by London Stereoscopic and Photographic Co.

BEN WEBSTER

I took the MS. for a final revise, compressed here, expanded there, touched up everywhere, and returned it to Taylor, who took exception to every alteration I had made. Webster stood by him, and that jade Stirling stuck up for him too.

Finding three to one against me, I went off in a huff to Ipsden.

The strain had been too much, and when I got home I broke down utterly.

The Mater got alarmed. She had heard a great deal of Gully's famous hydro. at Malvern, and insisted on packing me off there for rest and recuperation.

Alas! I got nothing but loneliness, vexation, and misery. Although 'twas "the merry month of May," it rained cats and dogs, morning, noon, and night. Gully gave himself the airs of the Great Mogul, and his wretched patients trembled at the fellow's approach.

The meagre diet and the rigorous discipline disagreed with me, so I kicked at it. In coming to Malvern I had another object in view, which I was utterly unable to carry out. Enraged beyond endurance with the barbarous treatment accorded to my play (for it *was* mine!) I resolved to write a novel on the subject, determined, at least, that they shouldn't lay violent hands on that—and hang me! if I could write a line for days and days. In fine, during the whole month of my stay in this mental and bodily ice-house, I don't think I wrote, at the outside, thirty pages of MS., besides which, I gained neither health, strength, nor serenity—in fact, I gained nothing but an elaborate study of the "Boss," which I utilised afterwards in "It's never too late to mend."

My mind was utterly collapsing, and just as I had determined to get out of this cavern of despair, I got a letter from the gentle James, telling me that he had heard from a veracious source that they had metamorphosed "Masks and Faces" beyond all recognition.

While writhing under this infliction, came a letter from Taylor, telling me the rehearsals had progressed so satisfactorily that the play would be produced the following night, and that seats had been reserved for me, that he, Stirling, Webster—in fact, everybody, hoped I would come and participate in the triumph which they anticipated.

The news cured me of the blue devils and set blood, heart, and brain going. I was alive again!

Within half-an-hour I had settled up with that old beast of a Gully and was on my way to the "faithful city," where I caught the express to town.

It was ten o'clock when I got to the theatre. Upon inquiring of the stage manager about the morrow's rehearsal (at which I hoped to be present), he informed me that the last rehearsal had been so satisfactory, there would be no further call. With this news I comforted myself as best I could, until the curtain rose the following night.

A memorable night for all concerned!

Webster was a bit loose in the text (he always is!); then that infernal "Zumerzetshire" dialect was against him, but he *can* act; and as for La Stirling, she carried everything before her like wildfire; and the curtain fell upon a scene of unbounded enthusiasm.

I forgot all about the alterations and the rows, and ramped round in a transport of delight, embraced my faithless Peggy in sight of all Israel, hugged Taylor and Webster, and then, for the first time in my life, was called for, and Taylor led me before the curtain, and the house "rose at us," and I cried for joy.

A man of eight-and-thirty, brought up as a nob —and, I fear, a bit of a snob—hide-bound in insular prejudices, Vice-Chancellor of Maudlen to boot, I ought to have known better than give myself away like that; but a fella's only flesh and blood, after all, and I couldn't help it.

What is it Bulwer says, high-falutingly but eloquently, "I had gazed indignantly and from afar

at this dazzling and starry life," and now I was in the very thick of it. Yes; I had gained the prize at last.

In years to come I had, as you know, my triumphs, but this was the first time I tasted blood, and the cheers of the crowded and delighted pit lifted me into the seventh heaven.

If the Mater could only have seen that sight and heard those sounds, I really think she would have forgiven poor Peggy for poaching on her preserves at Oxford!"

CHAPTER VII

GENESIS OF "MASKS AND FACES"

Friction between the Authors—Rupture—Dispute as to the Allocation of Authorship—Reade's Version of the Collaboration—Arnold Taylor's Version—Tom Taylor's Statement to the Writer—Miserable Remuneration—Then and Now—Where Boucicault came in—Facts and Figures—The Bancroft Revival at the Prince of Wales and the Haymarket

"MASKS AND FACES" having become a classic, doubtless destined to endure so long as the language in which it is written exists, in order to preserve the proper sequence of events, I have decided, at this epoch in Mr Reade's narrative, to interpolate and place in evidence the remarkable developments, incidental to the inception, completion, and production of this great work.

It is scarcely necessary to study the "Amenities of Literature" to enable one to arrive at the conclusion that the genus author is the *genus irritabile*, and no two authors, no two men, were more irascible than Charles Reade and Tom Taylor.

Loving them both living, and mourning them both dead, "I persuade myself to speak the truth and shall nothing wrong either of them!"

Collaboration seems easy enough, but it isn't: it is a question of give and take, and requires delicacy, forbearance, consideration.

"An' two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind."

The question resolves itself into, "Which is it to be?"

WEBSTER AS TRIPLET MRS STIRLING AS PEG WOFFINGTON

MASKS AND FACES

If not the better, Taylor was the older soldier, and obviously entitled to the last word.

Ultimately considerable friction occurred and radical differences of opinion arose as to the respective share of the two authors in this work. Both sides have a right to be heard.

Here is the case, from Reade's point of view, put in his own words:

"What is the history of this play? I wrote a certain scene in which Triplet, whose broad outlines I then and there drew, figured; and another personation scene containing Peg Woffington, Colley Cibber, and James Quin. I showed these to Taylor as scenes. He liked these characters, and we agreed to write a comedy.

"I began. I wrote the greater part of Act I., and sketched situations of a second act—viz. the company assembled in Mr Vane's house, and Mrs Vane's sudden appearance; her kindness to Triplet, a mere sketch; Triplet's house, the first picture-scene almost as it stands now; and I wrote a little of a third act. Well, Taylor came down to me, added to my first act, filled up the chinks, got Vane into a better position, and made the first scene an act.

"I think it lay idle for six months. He then went to work and treated the rest in the same way. So that at this period he was author of two-thirds of the play, so far as sentences went. He was satisfied with it, and read it to Mrs Stirling, who said plump, 'It won't do.' Full stop for a month or two. Then he wrote to me, and I took the bull by the horns. *Flung Act I. into the fire*, and wrote a new act, dashing at once into the main story. I took his cold stage creation, Pomander, and put alcohol into him, and, on the plan of the great French dramatists, I made the plot work by a constant close battle between a man and a woman. I then took in hand Act II., and slashed through Taylor's verbosity, losing none of his beauties (and he had some pretty things) in that act. Then I came to Act III., where I found my own picture-scene wanted a little alteration. Then,

with the help of a speech or two of Mabel's, as sweet as honey (Taylor's), I softened Woffington, so that she cried in the frame, and Mabel found her out.

"Then I offered the MS. to Taylor. He did not like the fence-and-rail prepared for him, and he said, 'You reconcile the two women, and I'll go on.' Well, I did so, and I was not sorry to stop, for I was working in a high key, and did not see my way to sustain it through a mist of stagey manœuvres that I saw ahead. However, while at Paris I did actually finish the play on thin paper, and sent it to my *collaborateur*.

"He did not like my *denouément*. Hence he altered it, and read his to Webster, who did not like it. Taylor has altered it again, and so the matter stands."

So much for one side. Now let us see what the other has to say.

Here's the version of Tom Taylor's brother, Mr Arnold Taylor:

"Charles Reade and Tom Taylor first became acquainted in the winter of 1850-51, or spring of 1851. 'Twas in this wise: Mrs Stirling had put into Tom Taylor's hands Reade's play of 'Christie Johnstone,' and told the former who and what the author of the play was. My brother brought the play home to the Temple, where I lived with him, and the late Cuthbert Ellison, from August 1850 to August 1851. Hence my ability to fix the dates above given. Ellison and I were going to bed, when my brother came in and said, 'Stop; I want to read you a play by an Oxford man, one Charles Reade, about whom Mrs Stirling has been talking to me.'

"We listened to the play with great interest, and my brother warmly praised certain parts of it, adding, however, 'It is utterly unsuited for the stage, and so I shall tell Mrs Stirling when I return her the MS.'

"The verdict was a sad disappointment to Charles Reade, but he accepted it, and subsequently

published the story as a one-volume novel, in which the original dramatic form is visible throughout.

"The above incident led to the subsequent intimacy of Reade and Taylor, the introduction being made through Mrs Stirling. We saw Reade from time to time at our chambers, 3 Fig-tree Court, Temple, and his great desire then was to write a play in collaboration with my brother.

"In 1851 or 1852 Reade had the idea of a play founded on Peg Woffington, and I have the authority of my brother's assertion, often repeated in my own hearing and that of others, who can corroborate me, that when Charles Reade came to him on the subject, he had one character, and a bit of one scene, together with some vague, crude ideas how the play was to be worked into shape.

"In August 1851 my mother, brother, and others of my family went to live at Chiswick, and it was there that the play of 'Masks and Faces' was written, not entirely, but mainly in the form in which it was first acted.

"It was first played at the Haymarket in November 1852. I conclude, therefore, that the play must have been written at Chiswick, in the summer or autumn of that year.

"Anyway, Reade was our guest at Chiswick Lodge, and the method of writing the play was this, that during the day (my brother being in town at his office) Reade wrote long passages, which were as ruthlessly cut to pieces, or rejected, at night by my brother, when they sat down to put together and complete their work. And morning after morning, as I well remember, when we were at breakfast, Reade used, half in sorrow, half in fun, to say to my mother, 'There, Mrs Taylor, my gentleman has been at his old game. He has cut out every line of that dialogue, and all those sentiments you so much admired when I read them to you yesterday afternoon.'

"In this way the writing of the play went on till its completion in three acts. Amongst my

brother's MSS. I have found a fair copy, made by myself for the authors, of Act I. In this fair copy, corrected subsequently in my brother's handwriting, as the MS. shows, there is a great deal wholly omitted from the play as acted, but a great deal which was subsequently introduced by Reade into his novel of 'Peg Woffington.'

"Then followed further alterations. Very much to Reade's vexation, and contrary to all his ideas and wishes, *the play was cut down by my brother to two acts*, and worked by him into the shape in which it was finally acted at the Haymarket.

"I have abundant proofs in letters of Reade, written to my brother in 1852, how much this change went against the grain with him. He even objects to certain minor characters, and the names they bear. Further, these letters contain repeated evidence that Reade then fully recognised the difference between himself, an unknown author, and a successful dramatist like my brother.

"The latter, however, was never slow to do the fullest justice to a fellow-workman. And, often as I have heard him mention the one character and part of one scene alluded to, I always heard him add, 'But the beginning of the second act, the scene in the garret between Peg Woffington and Triplet and his family—the best, I think, in the whole play—was entirely Charles Reade's.'

"'Masks and Faces' proving a great success, Reade then, without so much as naming his intention to my brother, produced the novel of 'Peg Woffington.'

"This naturally set people asking whether the play of 'Masks and Faces' or the novel of 'Peg Woffington' was written first? If the latter, all the credit or originality rested with Reade, and Tom Taylor had merely been asked to use his experience as a playwright, and throw the story into dramatic form.

"My brother having remonstrated with Reade on the line he had taken, the latter then prefixed to the

THE SUPPER IN TRIPLET'S GARRET

novel the dedication, dated 15th December 1852, 'To Tom Taylor, my friend and coadjutor in the comedy of "Masks and Faces," to whom the reader owes much of the best matter of this tale.'

"I find the same dedication repeated in a new edition of 'Peg Woffington,' published in 1857.

"I thought, and still think, and said so at the time to my brother, that the language of the dedication was not adequate to the circumstances and the facts.

"His answer, as far as I can recall it, was, 'Reade's a queer fellow, with odd notions about the rights and wrongs of things, and I'm quite willing to let the whole thing pass and be forgotten.'

"But the matter left, I think, a soreness on both sides, for it was not until April 1854 that their second play, 'Two Loves and a Life,' was produced at the Adelphi, and their third, 'The King's Rival,' at St James's, in October of the same year.

"Shortly after the production of 'Masks and Faces,' Reade produced a play, all his own, 'Gold,' which I well remember seeing at Drury Lane.

"It is only necessary to recall that immature production to be convinced that the hand that wrote it was incapable of the terse, sparkling, and polished finish of 'Masks and Faces.'

"The play, as first produced, was, as every one knows, an immense success. It may therefore be inferred *that the cutting down the three acts to two*, the changes in the scenes and incidents, the cutting out of some and the insertion of other minor characters, all done by Tom Taylor, against Reade's wish or consent, as his own letters show, had much to do with the success of the play during its run at the Haymarket in 1852, and subsequently at the Adelphi.

"I therefore sum up my narrative of what is within my own knowledge by saying that I believe Mrs Seymour had no acquaintance with Reade when 'Masks and Faces' was written by him and Tom Taylor; that the idea of making Peg Woffington

the heroine of a play was exclusively Reade's; that the shaping of the play into the form in which it was finally produced was Tom Taylor's; but that the credit of the play should be equally divided between the two authors, as each brought to the work qualities and powers peculiarly his own, the ultimate result being the production of certainly one of the very best and most finished comedies of modern times."

So much for Mr Arnold Taylor's version. Now for mine.

Mr Tom Taylor himself informed me how he became acquainted with Reade, and the circumstances which led to their collaboration in "Masks and Faces."

"Reade," said he, "had written a play called 'Christie Johnstone,' which he had sent to Mrs Stirling, who passed it on to me. One night, while swinging in my hammock at my chambers in the Temple, I read it to my brother Arnold and a friend. I was struck with the power and vigour of the diction and the exciting nature of the incidents, but thought the plot quite unsuitable for dramatic treatment. Under this impression, I wrote to Reade, urging him to convert the drama into a story, suggesting a particular mode of treatment, concluding the letter with the famous quotation, 'Yea, by ——!' said my uncle Toby, 'it shall not die!'

"This led to an acquaintance which soon ripened into intimacy between Reade and myself, during which he suggested the idea of collaborating in a comedy with Peg Woffington for the heroine.

"The notion struck me as being a very good one, and I assented to it. He sent me one scene—crude and invertebrate, but promising. Then he wrote reams and reams of impractical and impossible stuff which I had to knife.

"By-and-by he came down and stayed with us at Chiswick, where the same process was repeated nightly.

"At last I had to rewrite the play from stem to

stern, and he 'rucked' at it. Then he had a shy—and I had another.

"At last the thing got so mixed, that hang me if I can't tell which was his share and which was mine.

"I only know that, conditional upon the play's being accepted at the Haymarket, I insisted on the last word, and had it.

"As you are aware, he is hot-tempered—and when crossed I am not the most amiable fellow in the world—so there was a row. He went away telling me to do what I liked with 'the d——d thing'—only his language was, if possible, a little more Saxon than that.

"To be precise as to our relations to this play, he invented the idea, suggested nearly all the characters, and most of the incidents, but he put them together higgledy-piggledy. They stood on their heads, and I put them on their heels.

"The picture, eh? You may be right—I dare-say you are. I don't care a button whether you are or not. The incident was good enough for him, wherever he found it, good enough for me, and evidently good enough for the public!

"As for the novel? Well, I was a little riled about that; but you know he is always a great boy of a fellow, and very lovable at times, so I let it pass. And now, pass the bottle."

Apropos of the "picture incident" to which Taylor refers in the previous statement, Reade was under the firm impression that he had invented the incident of Peg's posing in the picture in Triplet's garret.

There is no doubt he believed so—but observe:

Bayle Bernard had availed himself of it in "The Mummy" long prior to the production of "Masks and Faces," and there is a play of Kotzebe's, the name of which I cannot call to mind, although I happen to have acted in an English version at Bath in my youth, which, to the best of my belief, was called "The Old Commodore," and the title *rôle* was played by Munden. There there is an old sailor (a very fine part), originally played by Jack Bannister. This

was the part allotted to me. In the last act there is the identical incident of the picture. Besides which, there is an old *ballet d'action* which I have seen played scores of times by the famous pantomimists the Leclerqs and Bolenos, in which the same incident occurs.

Reade himself told me that the present last act of this play was originally intended for the first, and that, when it was transposed to the position it now occupies, he wrote a new first act, which he submitted to Taylor for his approval.

The latter returned it with a laconic note, stating that there were only six lines worth retaining, and that they wanted re-writing.

The Charles Reade of that epoch was not the Charles Reade of later days.

At this period of his career as a dramatist evidently he believed that "humility is the first step on the ladder of wisdom," inasmuch as he wrote back to his collaborator: "You say there are only six lines worth retaining. I can find only three. These I've preserved, and the others I've put on the fire."

There is nothing new under the sun — except treatment, and it must be admitted that Reade and Taylor treated the incident of the picture in a masterly manner.

However the share of the composition of "Masks and Faces" may be allotted, there can be no doubt that, whoever did the work, it was well done.

If Reade "raised a mortal to the skies," surely Taylor "drew an angel down"; and the triumphant reception of the play placed both men on a pedestal from which they have not since been dislodged.

Yet how paltry was the remuneration for these months of patient toil! This masterpiece was actually sold to Webster for £150!

Twenty-one years after its original production, Reade himself paid £200 (that is to say, £125 more than he had actually received!) to redeem and resume the rights in "Masks and Faces."

What remuneration he received on the first pro-

SIR SQUIRE BANCROFT AS TRIPLET

duction of the play at the Prince of Wales's (in 1875) I don't know, but the honorarium paid on the last revival is clearly set forth in the following note from Sir Squire Bancroft to Reade's literary executor:—

"On the occasion of the last revival of 'Masks and Faces' we paid Mr Reade £3 a night.

"It must, of course, be remembered that the three-act form of 'Masks and Faces' was due to our suggestion; but, after our next season, we shall be quite content for the rights in such new scenes and alterations to be solely yours."

According to Reade's statement, which is corroborated by Arnold Taylor (see *ante*), the play was originally constructed in three acts, but Tom Taylor insisted on cutting it down to two. Yet, after an interval of more than twenty years, the Bancrofts instinctively reverted to the original arrangement.

By their courtesy I am enabled to quote the following extracts from their interesting work, "On and Off the Stage:—"

"It was not an easy task to persuade Charles Reade, to whom this comedy belonged (he having some years before bought Tom Taylor's share from him), and with whom all our negotiations took place, to give his consent to the changes we wished to make. At length, however, after many a tough fight, we won the day and gained our wish, having afterwards the great satisfaction of Reade's approval of every change; and when the play reverted to him, he discarded the old book for ever, and ordered *replicas* of our prompt copy for his future use.

"There have been so many and such varying statements made concerning these alterations of 'Masks and Faces,' that perhaps the following outline of facts upon the subject may still have interest, especially to the admirers of the two distinguished authors, who might be fairly called the Beaumont and Fletcher of this century.

"First, it was advisable, in our opinion, that the play should be in *three, instead of two acts as hitherto,*

hence we supplied an opening scene. To aid this view, Mrs Bancroft drew up a rough sketch of an interview between Quin and Kitty Clive, to end in a quarrel over their criticisms. This notion, Reade at once agreed to, and in his large-hearted way proposed that Tom Taylor should be asked to write the dialogue, that he might have the fee we proposed to give for the work, as it would be to him a little consolation for no longer sharing in the nightly royalties. Taylor agreed, wrote the scene admirably, and gracefully acknowledged our cheque for £50, which he was good enough to think a far larger sum than his work entitled him to accept. Some changes at the end of Act I. were made by Reade. The dialogue of the scene at Ernest Vane's house remained virtually the same so far as mere words went, although, here and there, it was better hook-and-eyed together; a few speeches and lines, having no pretence in a literary sense, but of great value in the acting, being now and again added by Reade at our suggestion throughout the work; but it was the *treatment* of the play we chiefly ventured to alter, not the play itself.

"Our great fight was over the end of it; and only after many struggles did Reade allow us to cut out the old stagey, rhyming tag, and agree to the pathetic ending we proposed. We conquered him at last by acting to him what we wished to do, when Peg, just before we wanted the curtain to fall, tearfully accepted the tenderly, though modestly, offered sympathy of the grateful Triplet, and dropped her head upon his breast. Reade cried like a child, and said to my wife: 'You're right, my dear; you're a woman, and of course you're right; you shall have it your own way.' In a letter written afterwards he says: 'Dear Peg, you are too much for me; and after this I don't measure my wit against yours for a month or two. I "cave in," as the Yankees say, and submit at once to your proposal.'

"We had many a talk together about the play with Reade, as to which was his share, and which

was Tom Taylor's; he frankly told us the whole story of its growth and completion, always regarding the work as fairly divided between them. The conception of the play, which arose from his looking for a long time one day at Hogarth's portrait of Peg Woffington in the Garrick Club, and its most beautiful scene, were certainly Reade's; but Taylor was responsible for a delightful part of the second act, and undoubtedly put many of Reade's early ideas into more workmanlike shape.

"Very diligent rehearsals attended this production, and we did not feel it ready to face the heat of criticism until November. On Friday, 5th, 'Money' was withdrawn, and the following night we acted the revised version of Reade and Taylor's play for the first time, with the following cast:— Sir Charles Pomander, Mr. Coghlan; Ernest Vane, Mr Archer; Colley Cibber, Mr Arthur Wood; James Quin, Mr Teesdale; Triplet, Mr Bancroft; Mr Snarl, Mr F. Dewar; Mr Soaper, Mr F. Glover; Lysimachus, Master Glover; James Burdock, Mr Stewart; Colander, Mr Denison; Hunasdon, Mr Newton; Peg Woffington, Miss Marie Wilton (Mrs Bancroft); Mabel Vane, Miss Ellen Terry; Kitty Clive, Miss Brennan; Mrs Triplet, Miss Lee; Roxalana, Miss Glover. Act I.: The Green Room of Old Covent Garden Theatre. Act II.: No. 51 Queen Square. Act III.: Triplet's Home.

"I (S. B. B.) may here say it was not without much fear and trembling that I resolved to play the part of Triplet. I felt, however, unless I made some effort equally bold, that I should be doomed to the inanition of ringing the changes on what had now for some time grown to be called 'Bancroft parts.' Happily, through hard work and patient thought, my ambition met with some reward. During the run of the play, I remember attending a meeting of a theatrical character, held at the Mansion-House. Its object has escaped my recollection; but what lives in my memory is encountering Benjamin Webster there. The old actor,

after looking long and earnestly at me for some time, said pleasant, graceful things of his own old part to the younger Triplet.

"Success of the highest kind rewarded our work, and it has throughout been our impression that 'Masks and Faces' has, in all ways, been one of our truest friends. Permission was obtained from the committee of the Garrick Club to have copies made of some pictures of the time from its celebrated collection, and so we adorned the walls of the first act, which represented the green-room of Old Covent Garden Theatre, with reproductions of Grisson's portrait of Colley Cibber as Lord Foppington; the well-known picture of Garrick as Richard III.; Vandergucht's portrait of Woodward as Petruchio; and Zoffany's Garrick, and Mrs Pritchard in Macbeth, dressed in court clothes of the period.

"The beautiful tapestry chamber which formed the scene of the second act was, perhaps, with a group of characters on the stage, one of the most real pictures of those times ever shown in a theatre.

"Reade, though very critical, was very pleased. On reaching home after the first performance, he wrote the following lines and sent with them in the morning an autograph letter of Margaret Woffington's:—

"'Presented by Charles Reade to his friend Mrs Bancroft, upon her admirable personification of Peg Woffington in "Masks and Faces."—C. R. *Nov.* 6, 1875.'"

Upon Reade's invitation I came up to town to see the first night of the revival of this delightful work at the Prince of Wales's, and by the courtesy of the Bancrofts I saw the last at the Haymarket, on their retirement from the stage, 20th July 1885.

In the first instance, I was under the impression that these accomplished artistes had overweighted themselves with Peg and Triplet, and did not

LADY BANCROFT AS PEG

hesitate to say so to Reade. "Wait, and you'll see," he replied.

I did wait, and when I had seen, I avowed that I had been mistaken.

"I knew it, I knew you'd say so!" Reade exclaimed. "I wish you'd write and say to them half the pleasant things you've said to me."

"No, thanks!" I replied. "We actors are a thin-skinned race, and they might not appreciate my opinion."

I say now, however, that, having been familiar with Lady Bancroft's career from its commencement, and with most of her husband's, that

> "Nothing in (their artistic) life
> Became (them) like the leaving it!"

and that, so far as I am qualified to form an opinion, their impersonations of Margaret Woffington and James Triplet may challenge comparison with the best, and hold their own. More than that, their alterations are distinct improvements, more especially the pathetic termination which now supersedes the 'ti-tum-ti' stuff which preceded it.

I dwell on this feature especially, inasmuch as the author (*i.e.* the genus author) is but too apt to maintain that the actor is always anxious to sacrifice good taste in order to curry favour with the "groundlings."

Now these distinguished artists deliberately preferred to relinquish rounds and rounds of applause (easily elicited from a fashionable *clientèle*, by the delivery of half-a-dozen lines of frivolous nonsense) in order that they might reach the nobler region, where Pity lies beside the fount of tears.

I can answer for one auditor who (not ashamed to be a boy again) felt the mother stir within his heart and eyes when the curtain fell on sweet Peggy weeping on dear old Triplet's breast.

In Garrick's time, Dr Johnson got for six nights of "Irene" (a bitter, bad play) £315; Lillo,

for his stupid "George Barnwell," £1000; Night-thoughts Young got a large sum for "The Revenge," and £1000 for "The Brothers"; Goldsmith £900 for "She stoops to Conquer"; while at a later period Holcroft got for "The Road to Ruin" £1300; and for "The Follies of a Night," a translation of Beaumarchais' "Figaro," £900; and in the days of Reynolds, Morlon, and Mrs Inchbald, it was not an uncommon thing for a dramatist to receive £1000 or £1500 cash for a play, or even for an adaptation, and it is on record that George Colman actually received £2000 for "John Bull"! Yet to such an extent had the value of dramatic work deteriorated, that "The Lady of Lyons," the most attractive play by the most popular author of the period, was sold to Macready for £210, and so flattered and delighted was Bulwer by its success after the failure of his preceding play, "The Duchess La Vallière," that he declined to receive any remuneration whatever, and made a free gift of the piece to Macready.*

To render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, it is only just to the memory of a much-maligned but remarkable man to record the fact that Dion Boucicault was the first person to emancipate the helpless author from the thraldom of the dominant manager.

Singularly enough, the emancipation arose not from Boucicault's preternatural 'cuteness, but (so he assured me) from the impecuniosity of an American manager, who, being unable to pay the modest honorarium of a thousand dollars to which the author was entitled, suggested as an equivalent a certain percentage of the receipts.

Being hard up, he accepted the proposal with dire misgivings as to the result.

* "*March 2nd.*—Wrote to Bulwer, with a box for his mother and a cheque for £210.

"*March 22nd.*—Received a letter from Bulwer, returning me the cheque for £210, which is a recompense for much ill-requited labour and suffering. It is an honour to him and a subject of much pride to myself." "Macready's Diary," 1838.

To his amazement, instead of the thousand dollars to which he was originally entitled, "Boucy," actually netted thousands and thousands of dollars!

From that time forth, he held on to the custom, and introduced it here, where it prevails to this day.

For "Two Loves and a Life," the best, the very best play ever written by Taylor and Reade, they received between them £100, while for the "The Ticket-of-Leave Man," which, except "Hamlet," "The Lady of Lyons," and "East Lynne," has drawn more money than any play ever acted, Taylor received the munificent honorarium of £150, out of which he had to pay something to a friendly ghost who translated it ("convey," the wise it call) from the French; whereas, Boucicault soon afterwards inaugurated the system which enabled him to make thousands and thousands out of the "Colleen Bawn," the "Octoroon," "Arrah na Pogue," "Streets of London," and "After Dark."

In fact, he made more out of *one* piece than Tom Taylor did out of a hundred!

CHAPTER VIII

ANONYMÆ

Adventure in the Vestibule of the Old Haymarket—A Cab and a Quandary—Triplet and Peggy and the Fair Anonymæ—A remarkable Coincidence at the Hummums—Jenny Lind and the Opera—Jealousy—A Trip to Durham with a Compagne du Voyage—Beauty and the Beast—An Actor and a Horsewhip—Durham Jail and the Governor—The Chaplain and his Patients—Leo and the Pickpocket—Origin and Evolution of "Gold"—"Gold" written and read to Charles Kean and the Keeleys—Non possumus—Sold to Slavery—Two Letters

"WANT to know how "Never too late" was born, eh?

It never was born, sah! Like Topsy "it growed."

How—how? Why, through a woman, of course. That is to say, the original conception of the thing. Since the time of Mother Eve woman has been in at the beginning of everything.

It was during the early run of "Masks and Faces" at the Haymarket. The theatre was crammed to suffocation. Just as the curtain fell, down came a deluge; the audience streamed out from boxes, private boxes, and upper circle into the vestibule (you know how miserably small it is even now!). People at front couldn't get out for the rain, while people at back struggled to get to the front. Caught in the crowd, I was cannoned full butt against a lady immediately in front of me, and fortunately, yes, I repeat, most fortunately, trod upon her opera-cloak.

As she turned upon me like a tigress, the sight of her flashing eyes and her marvellous beauty took my breath away. Anything so gorgeous I never saw before, nor have I ever seen since.

Tall and stately as a ship in full sail, with square brows, eyes blue one moment, grey or green the next, short, straight nose, ruddy lips, complexion like a ripe peach, a wealth of sunny brown hair, and the loveliest neck and shoulders possible to imagine.

Her dress was of some diaphanous stuff, of pale sea-green, over it a white burnous (the beautiful garment which I had defiled with my clumsy hoof). Flowers—roses and lilies of the valley and fern leaves—were in her hair and on her neck.

She told me afterwards that, as our eyes met, I blushed like a girl.

"Really, it is not my fault! I couldn't help it —'pon my soul, I couldn't!" I gasped.

She relaxed into a smile, murmured something about a cab. I offered to get one, she assented, and I made my way towards the portico. A cab was not to be had for love or money; indeed, crowds were fighting for them at the Opera opposite. The fireman, however, promised to do his best, and I returned to say as much.

Presently fireman came to report progress.

"Laidy'll have to wait 'alf-an-hour, sir, afore her turn. Seein' as 'ow she's a friend o' yourn, sir, I tuk the liberty o' hordering cab round to the stage-door in Suffolk Street. If you'll let me show you hover the stage, you're there in less nor no time, sir."

I hesitated—my lady didn't, but simply replied, "Thanks, so much. Should like it awfully!"

Fireman, bent on a tip, let us through the side door with his pass-key, and showed us on the stage. The scene was being struck. Triplet and Peggy were discussing something or other. When they caught sight of us His face (he was a gay old dog!) lighted up like sunshine; Hers clouded like a thunder-storm.

"Brought your fair friend, doctor, to have a peep behind the scenes?" said he. "Introduce me."

Here was a dilemma: I didn't know my lady's name.

I have always noted, however, that in emergencies of this kind, women are much more self-possessed than men, so while I stuttered and stammered, "Oh yes! Certainly!—Miss—Miss—ah—!" She supplied the missing link by calmly interpolating, "Smith—Wentworth Smith."

Ben was a born lady-killer. He had paid pretty dearly, though, for acquiring the accomplishment. While yet a lad, a mature and majestic widow, old enough to be his mother, with a ready-made family of four children, had got him in a corner, and, willy nilly, chained and secured him in the bonds of matrimony. He was then only eighteen. At eighty the young rascal married a girl of eighteen, who, in due course, made him a happy father! On the present occasion he monopolised the conversation.

"Who's your friend?" demanded Peg, sharply.

"Don't know."

"Not!"

"Never saw the lady in my life before."

"Then how dare you bring her here?"

"Pure accident, I assure you. If you will allow me to explain——"

"I require no explanation. I don't form promiscuous acquaintances, and don't care about knowing people who do. Good-bye, sir."

And, with a haughty curtsey to me, and a baleful look at the fair stranger, the irate Peggy swept off.

At the very moment when I was wishing my new acquaintance at Jerusalem or Jericho! my friend the fireman announced the cab; whereupon, cutting short Triplet's compliments, I escorted my lady to the stage-door. Having handed her into the Hansom (for it was one), I inquired, "Where to?"

"The Hummums. Can I give you a lift?"

I couldn't have made Peggy or Triplet or even you, sir, for that matter, understand the remarkable coincidence that I happened to be staying there myself, but so it was! It was still raining cats and dogs, so I stepped out of the storm into the cab, and off we drove to the Hummums together.

On our arrival, I asked permission to call in the morning and pay my respects—did so—found my fair friend more charming than ever. Apparently she had learned all about me, and was full of the play—and the author!

"Wonderful thing! would like to write a play herself, if she knew how. Lived at Durham, and was returning home to-morrow. If I happened to be passing that way she would be delighted to see me and introduce me to her mother," etc.

I promised on my next trip to the north to break the journey at Durham.

"She was going to the Opera that night—had a box Lady E—, a friend of the family, had given her. Did I like music? Yes! she was quite alone. Supposed the box was big enough for two?"

Of course, you knew, Her Majesty's is exactly opposite the Haymarket? As we drove there that night we encountered Peggy's brougham with Peg in it. Both women glared at each other—one looked daggers at me, while the other looked daggers at her.

Jenny Lind was delightful, so was Lilian, only more so. Nice name Lilian, don't you think so? When we got home we discovered we had neither of us dined, so we made up for it by supping together in the coffee-room. How I did enjoy that supper! and I scarcely knew which I enjoyed the most—the supper or the company.

Lilian was leaving in the morning, so I made up my mind to visit brother Bill in his Highland home at once, breaking the journey at Durham. The run is a long one from King's Cross, but it passed all too quickly, and I was astonished when I found we had got to the end of our journey.

When we arrived, a stylish carriage and pair were waiting at the station, and the most inexpressibly hideous beast that ever wore boots and breeches was introduced to me as her *fiancé*.

Beauty and the Beast truly!

"H'm!" thought I, "Hideous as he is, I suppose the beast has brains."

I was mistaken; he hadn't an ounce!

He had "Brass," though, was one of the wealthiest men in the county, and one of the most notoriously vicious. He had a voice, too—a voice that would have frightened a refractory hyena into fits.

Evidently it didn't frighten her; she seemed used to it. Another thing was equally evident, she wasn't quite so cordial to me as she had been throughout the journey. Polite though, oh yes! that's more, however, than could be said for Caliban.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks! Mamma will be delighted to see you, if you'll call to-morrow. Ta-ta; tea at five. You know the address."

The carriage drove away, and I was left alone!

There is a decent hotel, where they gave me a decent dinner, and there is, or was then, a decent little theatre, where Mr Paumier, a gentleman of family whom I remembered to have seen play Jaffier at Covent Garden, was taking his benefit that night, with "The Wonder" and "The Taming of the Shrew" for the programme.

So of course off I went after dinner to the theatre. The house was pretty full, and I was ushered into the right-hand stage-box.

In the one immediately opposite sat Caliban with half-a-dozen half-drunken, horsey idiots, enjoying themselves to their hearts' content by interrupting the play and guying the players.

The *beneficiare*, a tall, athletic, soldier-like fellow, didn't seem to appreciate these delicate attentions, but the angrier he became, the more amusing did it appear to my friends opposite.

Things reached a culminating point when Petruchio entered with his horsewhip in the wedding scene. At the sight of his eccentric attire and the sound of his whip, Caliban emitted a yell of derision which might have been heard a mile off.

It was his last laugh that night; for the next moment the infuriated actor collared the cad by

the scruff of the neck, swung him bodily on to the stage, where he horsewhipped him within an inch of his life, to the infinite delight of the audience, who not only applauded to the echo, but, when the curtain fell, lustily demanded an encore!

Unfortunately that laudable desire could not be gratified, for Caliban bolted as soon as he got a chance, and his friends immediately followed suit.

Shall I avow it?

I verily believe I slept all the sounder that night from the knowledge that that fella had tasted Mr Paumier's horsewhip.

Next morning I explored the beauties of Durham.

A charming, old-world place—lovely river, stately cathedral, romantic ruins, picturesque neighbourhood!

In the afternoon I called on Mrs Smith (Smith was not the name, but it will serve!) Amiable old invalid, widow of an Indian officer—evidently in embarrassed circumstances.

Noting the poverty of the land, I understood at once where Caliban "came in." Legalised prostitution, though one of the products of our civilisation, never commends itself to my admiration. In this case it was especially detestable, so I took my leave, determined to go on to brother Bill next day. But I had reckoned without my lady.

An hour later she came to the hotel. "I see how you despise me," she burst out. "Not so much as I despise myself—but I—it is for mother's sake. The marriage—marriage, did I say?—the sacrifice takes place in two months' time. Till then I'm my own mistress. There is much to see in the neighbourhood, and I have much to say. Can't we be friends for my last holiday? No concealment, no secrecy; it will be open and above board, and it will be something for me to think of in years to come."

She was young and beautiful. I was susceptible, besides which, the sex has always been an interesting study to me, and I—yes—you may snigger, sir, but if you'd been in my place you'd have done exactly what I did.

I stayed. We walked and talked, galloped over the Leazes, or rowed down the river, occasionally meeting Caliban, who scowled and growled, but didn't care, perhaps didn't dare, to interfere. She told me she'd had it out with him.

Had I been rich enough, I think I should have popped the question there and then, but I wasn't quixotic enough to plunge her and myself into pauperdom. Then there was the poor old mother besides, so I consoled myself with my darling Peggy — the Peggy of my dreams — and I wrote "Peg Woffington" — the first book I ever wrote — in Durham.

I scribbled in the morning, walked or rode or had a pull on the Wear with my lady in the afternoon. In the evening I read "Peg" to her and her mother—the mother was delighted, but Lily delightful.

She said she liked *my* Peggy better than the Peg she saw at the Haymarket. So did I, for this Peggy was my own, my very own, made of my blood, my bones, my brains.

Mrs "Smith" had very few visitors. One gentleman, however, frequently dropped in for a cup of tea —the Governor of the jail. He had been a brother-officer of the Colonel; they had served together in India. We (the Governor and I) fraternised; he took me and Lilian over the jail, introduced us to the chaplain, who introduced us to the thieves, his "patients," as he called them. I used to smuggle them in a bit of baccy (beastly stuff! but it made the poor beggars forget their trouble), a drop of gin, a handful of nuts, an apple or two, and a paper, *Reynold's* for preference.

The Governor and the chaplain knew all about this, but winked at it, while they said: "Doctor, we really must not see this." And they didn't see it.

The "patients" interested me muchly—one man in particular, named Jennins. This fella whom I was permitted to interview in his own cell, was very confiding—actually wrote his autobiography and gave it

to me. I polished it up, and gave it to the world afterwards as "The Autobiography of a Thief."

One day, after a prolonged jaw with him, my lady naïvely inquired, "Wouldn't he make a capital central figure for a popular drama?"

That was the germ from which Tom Robinson was evolved.

Our friend the Governor had been a Government Commissioner in Australia during the gold discoveries; was at Ballarat when the riots and bloodshed took place, had gone into the bush, knew a lot about the natives, and was never weary of talking of them and their queer ways.

Here again came in the superior intelligence of my lady.

"Fine theme for a drama of the day! Australia! —diggers, loafers, riots, gold discovery, natives! I can see it all!"

"So can I," I replied, and I *did* see it, and began to churn the incidents up day and night. Then Jacky began to dawn on me!

At dusk, when the mater was asleep, Lily played and sang, and did both divinely; then my play began to slowly take shape and to rise, like the walls of Troy, to music; and then—yes, then those happy days were over, for She had to take up her cross, and I—I could not bear to see her crucifixion!

The idea of abandoning my poor helpless Andromeda to the Monster made of money and mud, who was waiting to claim his victim, eager to defile her innocent maidenhood with his bestial beslobberments, set my blood afire. Powerless to protect or preserve her, the torture became so absolutely unendurable that one night I stole away by midnight train, without the "good-bye" I had not the heart to speak.

Years have elapsed since then, yet I never pass by the cathedral in the old northern city without a pang which wrings my heart. Doubtless you think that, by that time I ought to have left such weaknesses and such follies behind me.

I daresay I ought; but then, you see, I didn't.

Some people are born susceptible and sympathetic idiots. I'm one of them, and I know it. I make up my mind I'll never be so foolish again, and I never am—until the next time—and then God help my good intentions, for they invariably vanish to the place for which they ultimately become paving-stones.

You've drawn this yarn out of me by your persistent inquiries about the genesis of "Never too late to mend." I told you just now it originated with a woman, and, as I'll show you by-and-by, it ended with one.

Ah, well, well!

> "Green grow the rashes O!
> The sweetest hours that e'er I spent
> Were spent among the lasses O!"

When I got back to town I succeeded in inducing Bentley to publish "Peg Woffington," and, upon great persuasion, he consented to give me £30 for the copyright. Yes! I sold my darling for £30!!!

Then I went to Arundel Street, where I met with a freezing reception.

"What have you been doing with yourself all this time?" severely inquired Peggy.

"Writing a novel about *you*, and creating a great play besides."

"Oh, indeed! And what have you done with that hussy?"

"What hussy?"

"Oh, you know well enough. That gawky six-footer—the grenadier in petticoats!"

"If you'll be a little more explicit I'll endeavour to answer you."

"Very well, then; I'm referring to the huge, freckled, red-headed creature you had the cheek to bring behind the scenes, and whom I saw you take to the Opera the very next night! Yes, saw you, sir! What have you done with the jade?"

"She's married and settled."

"O—o—h!"

"Now may I stay to lunch?"

"Yes, if you'll behave yourself. That'll do, sir! —that'll do, I tell you!"

After lunch we buried the hatchet, and arranged to go down to Richmond on the Sunday after, with Webster and Taylor, and dine at the Star and Garter; where, by-the-by, Taylor and I arranged to collaborate in a new play for the Adelphi, which Webster promised to consider.

A few days after I went over to Paris (I really forget what for!), and the very first thing that caught my eye on the boulevards was the announcement of a new drama, called "Les Chercheurs d'Or," which I went to see that very night. It was founded upon life at the Australian goldfields!

Here was a surprise! Anticipated in my great work—in Paris! Doubtless some thief would come over, prig the piece, and produce it in London before I could get mine done.

There was not a moment to be lost. So back I went to Oxford, there and then, shut myself up in my rooms, pegged away day and night, night and day, until I had written "Gold!"

Where to get it done was the next question? To propose it to Webster for the Adelphi would be to imperil the piece which he had already promised to consider, besides which, it would be leaving Taylor in the cold.

In the emergency, by an inspiration, Charles Kean occurred to me for a part—the Jew, Isaac Levi. His Shylock was a great performance, and his Levi would have dominated the play.

He had recently taken the Princess's with the Keeleys. They were not high and dry classics, they had done "Pauline," and I had an insane idea they might look at "Gold."

Accordingly I wrote Kean, suggesting that I had "a new Shylock for him," and he replied by inviting me to come up and read my play.

I responded with alacrity.

He and Mrs Kean, the Keeleys, and Mr Cole

(formerly Calcraft, manager of the Dublin Theatre) had assembled in solemn conclave in the green-room, to hear and sit in judgment on my poor play.

I read them one act. It was a settler!

Kean was very nice about it, but Keeley was nasty.

"So this old clo' man's your new Shylock, is he? I should say *Shylot*," he burst out. "And where do I come in?"

"Yes," impatiently interjected Mrs Keeley; "and what price me and Missis Kean, I'd like to know, eh, Bob?"

"Oh, ask me another!" responded the indignant Robert. "I've had enough of your precious piece —enough and to spare! So take it off to the Surrey, or the Vick, or the Sour Balloon—I mean the Bower Saloon, sir!"

Kean, however, let me down gently: said the idea was original, the piece a strong one, but not adapted to the cult of the theatre, better try Drury Lane.

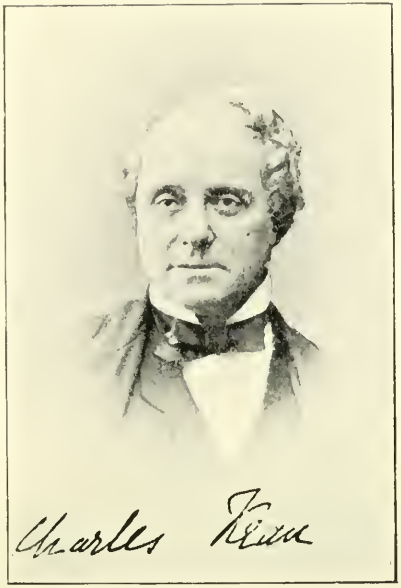
As a solatium to my wounded feelings, he invited me to an early dinner in Torrington Square.

A nice cosy meal: a broiled sole, a forequarter of lamb, peas, and mint-sauce, a salad, a gooseberry tart, and a bottle of Perrier Jouet. After dinner, they left me for forty winks, and recommended me to adjourn to the sofa, which (although an unusual thing for me at that time!) I did, and lost all count of time, until the maid (an uncommonly pretty girl by-the-by!) came and shook me up, and gave me a delicious cup of coffee.

"Please, sir," said she, "Mrs Kean said she thought you'd like a wash and brush-up. I was to show you to Mr Kean's room. This way, sir; and oh, sir, the bro'om's at the door, and Mr Kean's box is reserved for you."

It was with little delicate courtesies like this that Kean endeared himself to everyone.

The play was my old favourite, in which I had seen Mademoiselle Mars on my first visit to Paris. It was now called the "Duke's Wager," was capitally acted, and superbly mounted.



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CHARLES KEAN

Photo by H. N. King, Bath]

MRS KEAN

Kean's kindness didn't end here, for he sent to the Hummums for my portmanteau and tiled me up for the night—that is to say, for the morning; for, as you know, he is a delightful *raconteur*, and he regaled me with all kinds of romantic reminiscences of his father, and interesting stories of his own early struggles.

When he and Mrs Kean bade me good-bye in the morning, he said: "Don't be disheartened! Though "Gold" doesn't suit me, by-and-by you may have something that will, and we shall always be glad to see or hear from you. So good-bye, and good luck!"

Even this geniality did not remove my depression, for it was quite evident "Gold" was a drug in the market.

As for the Surrey, that was not to be thought of, and I knew no one at Drury Lane which was now under the management of a new man with the unusual name of—Smith!

On strolling round that evening to the Garrick to inquire for Taylor, the porter gave me a letter which bore the Durham post mark.

"Lying here a month, sir," said he.

Tearing it open, I read—

"Lily and I were spliced to-day, and be d——d to you! "You Know Whom."

Yes, I did know too well! Could I only have had the Beast before me at that moment at the end of a horsewhip, Paumier's flagellation would have been a fleabite to mine!

When we are approaching our meridian, time passes but too quickly, and I could scarce realise that two whole years and more had elapsed, when lo! a letter in a well-known hand reached me from shipboard at Liverpool. I know it by heart; it runs thus, or very like it:

"I have just read 'Christie Johnstone,' and am taking her with me across the sea.

"The reader unacquainted with the author would doubtless arrive at the conclusion that he knew all about a woman's heart. The reader would be mistaken.

"Had the author possessed the slightest knowledge of the subject, he would have known that, on that last night in Durham, had he held up his little finger, the girl at his side would have leaped into his arms. But he left her, left her without even a 'good-bye,' abandoned her to misery and shame, to horrible defilement, unutterable anguish, and hopeless despair!

"It is all over now, for poor mother has reached the end of her journey, and—*I am free!*

"Thank God! I have found someone manly enough to brave the world for me!

"To be sure, *He* is not a Fellow of Magdalen, but He is a Man—a Man who has sacrificed everything for the sake of the woman he loves. To-day we go forth together to fight the battle of life in the New World.

"If we succeed (as succeed we shall) you'll hear of me; and then, perchance, you'll say: 'And once that girl loved me!'

"I send you a good-bye and a kiss—which you don't deserve—but, alas! we don't love you barbarous creatures because you deserve to be loved—but just because we love you—and so, here's another, and yet another. And now—O lost love of mine—good-bye forever!"

Later I learnt that the poor soul had borne her cross with fortitude and dignity, till the mother for whose sake she had sold herself to this shameful bondage died. Then the bruised and broken flower rebelled, and, God help her! bolted with the curate to America.

It appears both had dramatic proclivities which drew them together, and, while Caliban was engrossed in horse-racing, cock-fighting, and other swinish Tony Lumpkin accomplishments, they de-

voted themselves to amateur play-acting, in which they distinguished themselves highly.

Obviously, they must have had exceptional ability, for, despite their limited experence, our friend Howse (you remember him?) told me they took the States by storm in—what do you think?—in "Masks and Faces."

In a few years they acquired both fame and fortune, and, while yet in the prime of life, retired with their children (half-a-dozen of them) to enjoy the *otium cum dig* at their ranche in California. Every season she sends me, per refrigerator, cases of peaches, pears, apples and apricots, and an occasional brace or two of canvas-back ducks, and other transatlantic delicacies, so, I suppose, the sweet soul has forgiven me for not "holding up my little finger."

In return, I send her all my books as soon as they are published, though, *entre nous*, I confess I would rather have been the author of those half-dozen sturdy olive branches (she has sent me their photos!) than of all the books in the universe.

("*And Caliban?*")

Oh, of course his injured honour was avenged! He obtained a decree *nisi*, and afterwards married *four* other wives. *Yes, sir, four!* The beast bullied and badgered and buried them all before he "sent in his checks."

Women *are* kittle cattle! When good they are angels, when bad they are—h'm! never mind!

If a satyr has only enough shekels, some of them can always be found to take up with the brute, hoofs, horns, tail, and all!"

CHAPTER IX

ASPASIA

At the Academy—An old Friend—The Garrick—The Haymarket and Evans—Paddy Green—Thackeray—Charles Dickens—Forster and Talford—Return of Aspasia—An Introduction and an Interview—"Christie Johnstone" once more—The *Coup-de-grace* to poor Christie—A Letter and a fateful Five-Pound Note—Making a Fire, and what came of it—Jermyn Street and its Occupants—Aspasia and the Trinity—The Author joins them

"LET me see, where did we leave off last night?
("*In California.*")

Ah! that was two years after She bolted from Durham. Let me take matters sequentially.

The day after the Keans rejected "Gold," I called at the Strand, to consult the gentle James, thinking he might know someone to introduce me to the new manager of Drury Lane. Jimmy was, however, not to be seen, so I made my way to Piccadilly to have a look at the pictures.

There was nothing, however, particularly worth seeing, so I turned out and strolled up the Burlington Arcade, when by a lucky accident I came plump *et poitre* against my old friend Morris, who had just returned from a voyage round the world. We fraternised, as of old, and I took him to dine at the Garrick. Then, wishing to impress him with my newly-attained glory, I took him to his father's old house (The Haymarket) to see "Masks and Faces." The theatre was packed, everything went like a park of artillery, and my friend was dazzled and delighted.

After the play we went to Evans', where he (Morris) introduced me to Paddy Green, who pointed out to us a great, hulking fellow, with spectacles and

grey hair, and a broken nose, and told us it was Thackeray; and a debonnair, fairish-looking little chap, with whiskers and long hair, a crimson velvet vest and a floridly embroidered shirt-front, and told us it was the immortal "Boz" himself; and that the two other gentlemen who bore him company were Mr Justice Talford, and Mr John Forster, editor of the *Examiner*.

Morris, who knew his way about, ordered chops and baked potatoes and liquid refreshment, and while we fell to, a choir of boys with angelic voices gave us:

> "The falling out of faithful friends
> Renewing is of love."

Presently we began to compare notes about our first acquaintance at the Haymarket, in the long ago, and my thoughts instinctively reverted to La Belle Aspasia, in "The Bridal," and her mysterious disappearance.

"Nothing mysterious about it, old fella. She's been in America," replied Morris.

"Indeed!"

"Yaas! Met her in New Orleans. In splendid form! Knocked 'em. Made her pile! Turned the heads of half the youngsters in the States. Might have thrown the handkerchief where she liked, if she hadn't had the misfortune to be spliced to that downy old card Seymour!"

"Married!" I said. "Married!"

"Didn't you know that? I thought everyone knew it. Marriage of convenience. Hard up! Out of an engagement. Old rooster had 'a bit,' stalled himself off for a man of fortune—old story. Guess she has to keep him now."

The news took my breath away.

"Still in America?" I gasped.

"Oh, no! Back here these three months."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas; trying to get an engagement, but crowded out! Saw her the other day. Looking for a shop or a new play to take into the country."

"I've got the very play to suit her."

"No!"

"Yes! Give me an introduction."

"Certainly. Here's my card. I'll send my man round and make an appointment for you to see her at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Hello! there's 'God save the Queen!' and we must clear out. Come along,—good-night, old man!"

"Hold hard! Where am I to find Aspasia—I mean, Mrs Seymour?"

"No. 13 Jermyn Street. So long—so long!"

Ridiculous as it may appear, I couldn't sleep all night.

Fifteen years ago! and yet it seemed but yesterday that I saw her at the Haymarket (the very theatre at which my play was then being acted) as Aspasia; and now married—yes, married to an "old rooster!"

Punctually as the clock struck five I was at the door of No. 13 Jermyn Street with my dearly-beloved "Christie Johnstone" under my arm.

I was shown into the drawing-room and received very courteously by my divinity, who appeared none the worse for fifteen years' wear. A little plumper, it is true, but not too much. "'Twould have spoiled a charm to pare."

"My friend Morris says you have a play which would suit me," said she.

"I think I have."

"H'm! Ever seen me act?"

"Yes; I saw you play Aspasia at the Haymarket in 'The Bridal,' with Macready."

"That was half-a-century ago, and must have been my grandmother!" she laughed.

"No," I replied seriously, "it was yourself."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"What did I wear?"

"White samite, embroidered with blue and gold, hanging sleeves, shoes of gold with three

straps over the instep, the daintest pair of feet, and the most beautiful pair of——"

"Thank you, it is not necessary to go into details. Besides, I've heard it all before. But you've a good memory! The idea of remembering all this time that my—ahem!"

"Remember! I shall never forget them! Then there was your hair——"

"Oh, I've got that still—at least a lot of it—but Aspasia? Ah, my Aspasia days are over! I want something more prosaic and less romantic."

"This play is not prosaic, but it *is* romantic."

"H'm! Have you ever done a play before?"

"A great many, but I've only had two acted."

"Where?"

"One at the Olympic; the other is being acted at the Haymarket now!"

"Indeed! What's it called?"

"'Masks and Faces,' — I thought everybody knew that."

"Never heard of it!"

(And this is fame!)

"And who plays the leading part, *my* part?"

"Mrs Stirling."

"What! that great fat thing?"

"Well, as to that, I really——"

"Oh, never mind her. Come to the point and let's hear the play."

Thus reassured, I commenced and read it to the best of my ability. When I had finished the first Act, she broke silence with: "Good, very good indeed for a story. 'Twould make a capital novel!"

I stayed to hear no more. Snatching up my hat and my MS. I darted out of the room without even a good-day.

So! Here was "another check to proud ambition." I thought all the world alive with the fame of "Masks and Faces," and this barbarous creature had never heard of it—never even heard of me.

Next morning brought me a note from Morris to this effect:

"ALBANY, *Thursday.*

"MY DEAR READE,—La belle Laura" (confound his impudence! How dare he call her Laura?) "has asked me to forward the enclosed. She says you are eccentric, and I think so too.—Yours always,

"A. M."

The enclosure was directed to me in a large, sprawling hand. As I tore it open a five-pound note fluttered out and fell to the floor. I know that letter by heart too—I've got it now. It was to this effect:

"13 JERMYN STREET, *Wednesday evening.*

"DEAR SIR,—I fear I must have offended you to-day. I beg you to believe I had no intention to do so.

"I was under the impression that you wanted to dispose of your play, and, as I really thought it better adapted for a novel, I ventured to make the suggestion.

"As unfortunately I cannot produce your charming work, I hope you will permit me to place the enclosed at your disposal as some slight acknowledgment of the pleasure derived from your admirable reading.—Yours faithfully,

"LAURA SEYMOUR."

I didn't know whether to be annoyed or delighted.

I!—who had been Vice-President of Maudlen. I!—who flattered myself I was coming to the fore as a dramatist—to have a five-pound note flung at my head, like a ticket for soup to a pauper, or a bone to a dog, and by an actress too! Yet she said my reading was admirable, and, after all, there is much virtue in a five-pound note. Anyhow it showed the writer had a good heart.

Of course I made up my mind to return it immediately—but how? by the post or by——

Thinking the matter over as I strolled through Covent Garden, a magnificent bunch of grapes at Solomon's caught my fancy (you know how fond I am of fruit!), so I secured it, and made tracks for Jermyn Street. I knocked at the door, but got no answer. Knocked again,—still no answer. I was turning away impatiently when the door opened cautiously on the chain. A saucy face peeped from inside, I peeped from without. There was no mistaking those eyes. The chain was withdrawn and the door slowly opened.

A lock of her beautiful hair escaped from a lace handkerchief which was thrown carelessly over her head and tied under her chin. Strangely enough (since she had sealed the fate of my poor Christie), she was made up for Christie Johnstone—a striped pink kirtle, and a short striped scarlet and green petticoat, with grey silk hose and crimson clocks. They—I don't mean the hose, but the beautiful and bountiful —ahem!—were there, symmetrical as ever, while the arms (the sleeves were tucked up), the shoulders and the neck, if a trifle more buxom, were bonnier than ever.

She held a hearth-broom in one hand and a dust-pan in the other.

As we looked at each other, she burst out laughing—then I laughed, then we both laughed together.

"So it's you, sir!" she said.

"Yes, madam, 'tis I myself and nobody else."

"And what brings you here?"

"This!" said I, handing over the five-pound note.

"You won't have it then?"

"Thanks! not at present."

"O-oh! Ahem! And what have you got there, pray?"

"A peace-offering," said I, presenting my grapes.

"What, grapes! For me? Oh, num-num! I was dying for some. Come in! come in!"

So saying, she led the way into the parlour,

flopped down on the hearthrug, and began to devour my peace-offering there and then.

"Halves!" said she, "the little devil's share!"*

The grapes disappeared with remarkable rapidity.

"Now help me light the fire. It's our slavey's day out, and I have to get the dinner ready."

I set to with a will, but made rather a mess of it. We got lots of fun, however, out of my bungling. More than that, in the fulness of time, this identical incident suggested that rattling comedy scene (which she played to such perfection afterwards) between Nell Gwyn and Charles the Second in "The King's Rival."

By the time we had finished, she had pumped me dry as hay, and knew as much as you do about my birth, parentage, and education.

When the fire was in full blast, she said, "Now off with you to Covent Garden, and bring me another bunch of grapes exactly like the first. Then away you go home, slip on a dress coat, and by the time you get back dinner will be ready."

"And I shall be ready for dinner," I replied, as off I bowled to Covent Garden.

When I returned, my lady had doffed her *deshabille*, and was transformed into a Duchess. Dinner was on the table, and there were three gentlemen waiting for it.

"Permit me," she said, "to introduce my family. Ahem! Mr Seymour, my husband, and my friends Captain Curling and Augustus Braham. Gentlemen, Mr Charles Reade, D.C.L., A, double S, and a lot of other things in the University of Oxford."

This unceremonious introduction put us at our ease at once, and we all laughed consumedly.

While dinner was being served, I had time to take stock of my companions. M. le Mari was an elderly, handsome man, of middle height, evidently of the great historic race; Curling, a dapper little

* "The Little Devil," a popular comedy of the period, taken from the French.

military swell; while Braham, son of *the* Braham, was a great, strapping, black-bearded Basso Profundo, with pronounced Semitic features.

The dinner came in from the hotel next door, and was served by a smart little Frenchman.

Never was there a more delightful repast, nor a more delightful dinner-party.

"Don't imagine, Mr Vice-President," said our hostess, "that we always indulge in this reckless extravagance. Chops and tomato sauce, a sole, or a salmon cutlet, an omelette or a macaroni cheese, and a bottle of *vin ordinaire* usually suffices for our modest menu. This sumptuous repast has been improvised to do honour to your first visit."

Then they drank my health, and I drank theirs.

Time flew all too quickly, and when I had to go it was quite a wrench to tear myself away, for it seemed as if we had known each other all our lives.

Thus commenced an acquaintance which was destined to form a turning-point in my career. In a week's time I became a member of that happy family, and to this day I bless the hour which led me to Jermyn Street, for there I found the wisest counsellor, the truest friend, that ever crossed my path in life."

CHAPTER X

THE TRINITY

Life at the Bungalow—Breakfast and after—A musical Party—The Brahams—A Slave of the Lamp in Account with Literature — Result of Eighteen Years' Labour — The Garrick—Bow Street and Covent Garden Market—Whist and what came of it—Aspasia speaks her Mind—She reads a Book and spoils the Dinner — Molière's Housekeeper *redivivus*—The Doctor turns over a new Leaf and gives "Christie Johnstone" a local habitation as well as a Name—The Yankee Pirates steal the poor Dear and coin Thousands, while the Author does not get a Cent—"Gold"—Still on the Shelf—When an unexpected Opening occurs at Drury Lane

"Curling christened our diggin's the Bungalow, and the Bungalow it remained until we left there. We divided the household expenses between the four of us—viz. Seymour, Curling, Braham, and myself. The Duchess (so I christened her) was free from all financial responsibility, but she was housekeeper and general superintendent, Queen of everything and everybody.

The only stipulation I made, was for a den to myself, for a study, and she allotted me an attic.

We all breakfasted and dined together. For the rest, 'twas Liberty Hall. From breakfast to dinner we rarely or ever met.

"The Holy Trinity," as the Duchess somewhat irreverently termed my three friends, were really men about town. They went their own way and I went mine, which always led straight from the breakfast-table to the ink-pot in the attic.

For fifteen or sixteen years I had, in somewhat

erratic fashion, been engaged in stuffing my head with facts, so as to have them handy in case of need. As yet they had been of little use. I had never written a book till I was five-and-thirty; and, after all these years, the mountain had brought forth a mouse —and only a very little one.

On taking up my abode at the Bungalow, I resolved to start fair, and this was how I found myself in account with literature in the year of grace 1851.

Item, My family had brought me up, and educated me, till I was sixteen.

Item, I earned my demyship, eighty pounds a year, at seventeen.

Item, At one-and-twenty I obtained my fellowship, beginning at two hundred and fifty pounds per annum, and ultimately rising to six hundred and fifty.

Item, Eighteen years devoted to the study of dramatic art.

Now let us see what I had gained for this outlay.

Item, "Ladies' Battle," *nil.*

Item, "Masks and Faces," half of one hundred and fifty pounds: seventy-five pounds.

Item, From Bentley for book of "Peg Woffington," thirty pounds.

In all, one hundred and five pounds. That is to say, about half-a-crown a week for eighteen years—not enough to pay for pens, ink and paper, leaving copying and shoe-leather out of the question.

Good God! had it not been for the fellowship,—which, though it bound me to celibacy, preserved me from pauperdom—and a mother's generous help, I must have been in the workhouse, or breaking stones on the highway.

It was all very well for Sir Walter to say, "Literature is a good crutch but a bad staff." Up to this time it had been neither the one nor the other to me, but simply vanity and vexation of spirit.

My poor play of "Gold" was lying dormant, and no one would even look at it!

To make matters worse I had fondly hoped that Taylor and I, between us, might have inaugurated a new era at the Adelphi, with "Two Loves and a Life," and lo! through a stupid matter of temper, we were at daggers drawn, not even on speaking terms! He thought *I* was a difficult fellow to get on with, and I *knew* he was.

Man is a gregarious animal, and I am more gregarious than most men. At home, no one had the slightest sympathy with my artistic aspirations. Mother's *idée fixe* was to make me a Bishop, and one of Calvinistic proclivities, which I can't abide—never could! My people all hated the theatre. Poor souls! they were born so, and knew no better!

Maudlen was a nest of scorpions. To be sure, Routh, MacBride, Ellerslie, and Bernard Smith were all friendly to me, but averse from my tastes and pursuits.

I induced them, once, to hear a Roman play of mine, read 'em all to sleep, went back to my rooms, and put poor "Caligula" on the fire.

The truth was I had not a single human being on whom I could rely for advice or assistance.

At this critical period help came to me from an unexpected quarter.

I was wont to scribble, in my shirt-sleeves, daily from ten to two, then shave, dress, and turn out into Piccadilly, over Leicester Square, across St Martin's Lane, and through Garrick Street to the Club.

In the summer, after skimming the papers, I invariably strolled down Bow Street to take a furtive glance at the players and play-actresses who, at that time, usually congregated there in crowds, laughing and talking, and recounting their peaceful triumphs, as if there was not an aching heart among the crowd.

How I used to envy the happy beggars! Poor souls! when I got to know 'em better, I found, not only aching hearts, but empty bellies, in abundance, amongst them.

After Bow Street came Covent Garden, to invest

in fruit or flowers (sometimes both) for the Duchess. Then, down the Strand and over Trafalgar Square, the shady side of Pall Mall, up St James Square, and back to the Bungalow. We (for Her Grace was not acting then) usually dined at seven.

We very seldom had company. Once, indeed, we had the Brahams, the old gentleman, Lady Waldegrave (she was not her ladyship then), Hamilton the tenor, and Warde, her favourite brother, who was a major in the regulars—or was it the militia? This little chap was the only one of the boys who in the slightest degree resembled his famous father.

Hamilton, who was fair, and above the middle height, looked of pure European strain. Augustus, a strapping six-footer, was Jewish to the core; while her ladyship, who betrayed not the slightest trace of Oriental descent, was one of the most beautiful, accomplished, and well-bred women I have ever encountered.

She sang charmingly, and played admirably, accompanying Hamilton and herself in the famous duet from "Norma." Augustus gave us "The Wolf" in grand style; while the old war-horse gave us the "Death of Nelson," and made my back open and shut. While I was yet gasping with delight, he told me a singular thing. The music of this great national English song he had cribbed, bodily, from the "March of Henri Quatre!"

On all ordinary occasions the Duchess usually adjourned after coffee. By-the-by, a pretty little ceremony always preceded her departure. When she rose, we all rose; the Captain ceremoniously opened the door; we formed two lines, two and two, through which she passed, extending her hands on either side, while we kissed them as she passed forth for the night. Somehow or other, when she left the room she took the light with her. The conversation invariably reverted to billiards and horses—things utterly uncongenial to me.

When these topics were used up, cards were produced.

Now, I like a game of whist, so we commenced at sixpenny points, which soon grew to half-a-crown, then to half-a-guinea. One week I dropped nearly twenty guineas. Then the Duchess intervened. How she got to know it I never understood. Enough that she *did* know.

Next day, as I was about to turn out for my accustomed constitutional, her maid came in. "Mrs Seymour's compliments, sir, and she'll be glad to see you in the drawring-room," said the gentle Martha.

When I came in, the Duchess opened fire without ceremony.

"Doctor," said she, "you are an ass!"

"Madam!"

"I repeat it! you are an ass: or you would have seen, long ago, that my husband and Curling are inveterate gamblers. Gus isn't much better, and I'm not going to have you 'rooked' in my house. You'll have either to drop it, or take up your bed and walk, —whichever you prefer."

"Do you want me to go?" I inquired.

"No," she replied, "I shall be sorry to lose you, for I like you. Besides, you're so weak, and, excuse my candour, such a lovable fool, that anyone, especially any woman, can twist you round her little finger!"

"Mrs Seymour!" I burst forth.

"I've not done yet!—there's a future before you."

"A future for a fellow of forty, who has done nothing but laze and loaf all his life!"

"'I wouldn't hear your enemy say so.' Your best has to come, if you'll only buckle to and work."

"You really don't want me to go then?"

"Of course I don't! You dear, stupid, old goose! But no more whist."

"What's a fellow to do? The nights are so desperately dull when you are gone."

"You don't expect me to sit there and hear those idiots talk of their luck at loo, their beastly billiards, or backing horses for a place. No, thanks! Life's too short for that. Besides, I can always find better company!"

"I didn't know you received company!"

"Yes, I do, every night. Here's my companion for to-night," and she handed me—"Jane Eyre."

"H'm! You're fond of books?"

"That depends."

"Would you like to read one of mine?"

"I won't promise to like it, but I *will* promise to read it."

I was upstairs like a lamplighter, and down like a flash of lightning with a copy of "Peg Woffington," then off I went for my constitutional. I didn't get back till late. Dinner was waiting, and I hadn't time to dress. Fish boiled to smithereens; melted butter, sludge; fowl burnt to a cinder.

Everybody savage and silent.

At last I made bold to inquire: "What's up?"

"You!—and your beastly book! Your precious Peg something or other," replied Braham.

"Peg Washington," interjected Curling.

"A Yankee girl, I guess; mixed up with the old prig who couldn't tell a lie," responded Seymour.

"Whatever it was," growled Braham, "the Duchess got stuck on it, and let the dinner go to old Scratch!"

"So sorry!" I said. But I wasn't a bit sorry; *au contraire*, I was delighted.

The men grew glummer than ever, till a happy thought occurred to me.

"Excuse me a moment," I said, and bolted, returning immediately with a magnum of Perrier Jouet, which I placed on the table.

It proved a peace-offering, and there was an end to the doldrums.

As the Duchess left the room she slipped a scrap of paper into my hand on which was written the word "Come." As soon as the Trinity were engrossed in whist, whisky and soda, and cigars, I left them, and went straight to the Duchess's sanctum.

"Well," she commenced, "of course you see, now, that the very first time I saw you I was right."

"Right?"

"Yes. I told you to put the Scotch girl—what's her name, Chris—Christie Johnstone—into a novel. Why haven't you done so?"

"One thing at a time. I couldn't do both at once."

"Well, you've done one. And now you must do the other."

"Do you know what I got for 'Peg'?"

"No!"

"Thirty pounds."

"Good God! You don't say so? Never mind! Go on—you'll make thousands some of these days. Though I detest that odious creature—that lump of obesity and vanity—who plays 'Peg,' at the Haymarket. I've seen 'Masks and Faces.'"

"You have?"

"Yes! went the night before last, by myself, to the pit—paid my money like a man! What a part! Oh, if I only had a chance like that! But never mind me! The piece is lovely, and the book—your beautiful book!—well, I couldn't leave it. Look at my hair, I hadn't time to tidy it, and now I declare it's tumbling down my back! Never mind my hair, but think of your head! The idea of a man to whom God has given a gift like this, wasting time on whist!

"Write 'Christie' at once. I don't mean *now*, this moment, but mind you start to-morrow morning after breakfast. Then, after dinner, leave those donkeys to their whist, and their whisky, and come here every evening, and bring what you've written."

"May I?"

"Of course you may. Who was the French author who used to read his plays to his housekeeper? Well, I'm your housekeeper, and you shall read your plays to me—that is, if you'll promise not to read me to sleep."

Next morning, I set to work with a will on "Christie" and wrote two chapters right off the reel. After dinner, I read them to her, while she sat in judgment.

In a month's time the story was written, and realised another munificent £30. Scarcely that, for we got to law and loggerheads about it! *

This was the only instance in which I knew the Duchess's judgment fail her. She erred in goodly company though, for, as I told you, Taylor was dead against "Christie" for a play.

The pirates knew better! They had learnt their trade, and were not thieves for nothing. It is the good subject they nail, not the bad one. The moment "Christie" was published here, it was packed off across the Atlantic by a purveyor of stolen goods, and dramatised immediately on its arrival in America, where for years and years it remained one of the most attractive pieces on the road.

Thousands and thousands of dollars were netted by the Yankee thieves, but the luckless author never received a red cent of the plunder!

I had taken the Duchess at her word, and, night after night, inflicted play after play upon her.

Despite her somewhat exacting criticisms she was particularly struck with "Gold," and, indeed, was under the firm conviction that it would prove a great success. The difficulty was to find a theatre where it could be done.

The perennial "Green Rushes" was still holding on at the Adelphi. "Two Loves and a Life" was booked to follow. Kean would have none of "Gold,"

* While correcting these pages for the press Charles L. Reade has sent me a curiosity, one eminently suggestive of his father—viz., Bentley's "statement" (printed, if you please, on white satin!) headed: "Analysis of the Accounts Reade *v.* Bentley, delivered previous to the Injunction."

"Peg Woffington," 1st Edition—500 copies, 10s. 6d.

Profit 1st a/c from Decr. 1852 to August 1853 .			*Nil*
„ 2nd a/c July 1856	£10	12	3
Second Edition—5,000 copies, 3s. 6d. Profit .	1	5	0
"Christie Johnstone," First edition—500 copies, 10s. 6d.,	29	11	0
Second „ „ „	44	14	6
Third „ „ „	4	10	10
Fourth „ 5,000 copies, 3s. 6d.	*Deficit*		

What the amount of the actual deficit was, does not appear on the face of the white satin.

Mathews wouldn't hear of it at the Lyceum, and Drury Lane was impossible.

Overwhelmed with grief and despair, I had resolved "to quit the loathèd stage." It is always loathed when we don't succeed—always loved when we do—this delightful, damnable art of yours.

I had reached the lowest depths of despondency, when one memorable morning (it was the day after Boxing Night, 1851) The Duchess bounded into my den, radiant, triumphant.

"News," she exclaimed; "news! I've just met Jimmy Rogers. The Pantomime at the Lane last night was a 'frost'—'guyed' from beginning to end!"

"Well, and what then?" I inquired, obtusely.

"What then? Grant me patience! Why, 'Gold'!"

"Gold"?

"Yes, Gold—G-O-L-D! GOLD! Man alive, can't you see they must have something to take the place of the pantomime? And you've got the very article they want, ready-made to their hands. Slip on your coat while I pack up your manuscript, and off you go and see Stirling, Smith's factotum, at once."

"Don't know him!"

"But *She* does!"

"*She!* Who?"

"Why, your precious Peg!"

"Peg what?"

"Not 'Peg what,' but Peg Woffington! You don't mean to say you don't know that Stirling is that hussy's husband? Well, you *are* a lunatic! Why, everyone knows they've been separated for ages through incompatibility of temper. (I don't wonder at it, for she'd try the patience of a saint!) But they're the best of friends in the world—at a distance! It's 'Fanny' this and 'Ned' that! 'Go' for her, and make her 'go' for him."

"H'm! I'll think of it."

"And while you are thinking, someone else will nip in, and, as usual, you'll be left in the cold. Now or never! Off you go. Dinner? Do without dinner

for once, or make her give you a chop. To do the jade justice, she's not inhospitable."

In-half-an-hour's time I was with my fair Peggy who rose to the situation; and whilst I was paying my respects to that chop, and another to keep company, with a "small bottle," she wrote an imperative missive to her "dear Ned," assuring him that "Gold" (which she had never read!) was the strongest drama ever written, and adjuring him to get it done immediately, and retrieve the fortunes of the theatre.

Now Stirling was himself a workmanlike dramatist and had compiled a number of more or less successful commonplace dramas.

His adaptation of "Nicholas Nickleby" at the Adelphi, drove Dickens furious, inasmuch as it was brought out before the story (which was published in monthly numbers) was finished. Hence, it anticipated the originally contemplated *denouément*, and (so Stirling assured me) caused Dickens to alter it! Anyhow, the drama, and Mrs Keeley's Smike, crowded the Adelphi for an entire season.

Half-an-hour after leaving Peg I was sipping port-wine negus with "Ned" in his snuggery. Half-an-hour later he introduced me to the renowned Smith, a vulgar but wonderful chap, full of brains as an egg is full of meat. Born the son of an admiral, he had been a bobby, a bum-bailiff, and ultimately became *impresario* of the Italian Opera.

He wasted no time in words.

"If you say it's right, old chap, right it is!" said he to Stirling. Then to me: "Look here, laddie, I'll stand twenty quid a week as long as the blooming piece will go—and a box, did you say? Put him down for the Royal box, Ned—Royalty never comes to the Lane nowadays—and there you are, don't you know!"

"Gold" was produced on the 10th January 1852, was adequately mounted, and sensibly, though not brilliantly, acted. Mr E. L. Davenport, a manly, robust American actor, who had distinguished himself in conjunction with Mrs Cora Mowatt at the Marylebone and Olympic Theatres under a manage-

ment which terminated under very tragic circumstances at Newgate, and who afterwards supported Macready during his farewell at the Haymarket, played the part at which you turned up your Grecian nose, sir! Henry Wallack was Tom Robinson; Edward Stirling, Isaac Levi; and Miss Fanny Vining, Susan Merton.

The public were enthusiastic, but the gentlemen of the fourth estate, as usual, bludgeoned me down first, executed a war dance on me next, and another on my unfortunate piece.

The house was packed nightly, with—paper, I presume, for at the end of the fourth week the bold Smith wanted to cut down my modest honorarium of £20 to £12. I declined and indignantly withdrew the piece, hence, he and I parted at daggers drawn when I made my exit from old Drury."

CHAPTER XI

THE DUCHESS MAKES A DEMAND

A Box at the Haymarket, and a Supper at the Café de L'Europe—"Les Dames de la Halle" at the Adelphi and Lyceum—"A Village Tale" at Punch's Playhouse — The Trinity's first Plunge into Management—Failure number one—Munificent Honorarium for "Two Loves and a Life" at the Adelphi—Second Plunge into Management at the St James's — Production of "The King's Rival"—Eloquent Eulogy upon the Lord Protector — Failure upon Failure — The Duchess puts her Foot down and points the Way to Success—An Inspiration: "Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going, And such an Instrument I was to use!"

"I COULDN'T get over the failure of my treasured hopes, and for a month or two was in the depths of despair.

"Have you anything to suit me?" abruptly demanded the Duchess one night after dinner.

"Well—yes; I've a couple of pieces taken from the French."

"Taken! Stolen, I suppose you mean. Well, we'll take one to-morrow night and one the night after."

We *did* take 'em, and they appeared to take her fancy.

The parts designed for her were central figures, and monopolised all, or nearly all, the interest, and she asked me to let her have the manuscripts to read herself.

Three nights later I had a box at the Haymarket, and invited the family to accompany me. (However wealthy a man may be, he never turns up

his nose at a private box, especially if he can get it for nothing.)

The Jews are the most generous race in existence, and they will stand a dinner which will cost five or ten guineas if they can secure a private box on the nod. Braham and Seymour both belonged to the great historic race. They jumped at the idea of the box, and proposed that we should dine at the Café de l'Europe. The Duchess wouldn't hear of this. "No!" said she, "a light and early tea-dinner at home, and supper after the play, if you like," and so the matter was settled.

The theatre was crowded, and money was turned from the doors.

The play went splendidly. Peg and Triplet saw us and acted to us and at us. "The eye can be as vocal as the tongue," and a kind of optical duel went on all the evening between the actress on the stage and the actress in the box. Their eyes struck fire as they glanced and glared at each other.

It was the old, old story of the "ins" and the "outs." The "outs" wanted to be in, and the "ins" exulted in keeping them out. In this case the "in" gloried in her triumph, for a triumph it was!

"It's the part," snapped the Duchess through her teeth as we came out. "There never was such a part!"

"Can't the doctor write you such an one?" inquired Seymour as we sat down to supper.

"He might try," I replied, "only, unfortunately, parts like Peg don't grow on every bush."

"Of course not, of course not! It's only the impostors who get chances like that."

"Wonderful business!" cut in Braham. "Old Ben must be in clover now, and not before he wanted it. To my certain knowledge he's been paying Isaacs, the tailor, fifty per cent. for months past to keep afloat."

"Well, he's afloat now at anyrate, and I only wish we could get a look in," said Curling.

"'Tain't likely! But we might have a little flutter on our own if the Duchess sees her way," suggested Braham.

"I'll sleep on it, and we can talk it over to-morrow," Her Grace replied.

She did sleep on it, with the result that we all resolved to put in a "bit" to give her a chance in my two new plays—that is, if we could get a look in anywhere.

And, there and then, Seymour and I set off to see your friend, old Copeland of Liverpool, who had taken the Strand Theatre and, at the instigation of his brother-in-law, Douglas Jerrold, christened it Punch's Playhouse.

Like Bailie Nicol Jarvie I have often said since:

"I wish my buits had been filled with het watther before I put 'em on for siccan a damnable purpose!"

But our first plunge into management is a long story, and——"

It *is* a long story, so long that, were I to repeat it, with all its prolix and piquant details, 'twould monopolise the remainder of this volume, hence I must needs boil it down to reasonable limits.

At or about March 1852 "Les Dames de la Halle" had made a great hit in Paris, and our managers immediately proceeded to appropriate the French author's property.

No less a personage than George H. Lewes went through the plundering process for the Lyceum, where his adaptation, "A Chain of Events," was produced on the aforesaid Easter Monday, in eight long acts, occupying the entire evening in representation.

A very splendid production it was. The cast included Charles Mathews, Basil Baker, Frank Mathews, Belton, Rosiere, Madame Vestris, Julia St George, and Laura Keene.

One effect—the sinking ship, with all hands

aboard—has not since been excelled; it is doubtful if it has been even equalled.

At the Adelphi, Webster himself did the "picking and stealing." Here also the piece was admirably cast: besides Celeste and Woolgar, Ellen Chaplin, and Kathleen Fitzwilliam, there were Wright, Sam Emery, O. Smith, and that accomplished actress Mrs Keeley.

Now, Reade had also appropriated "Les Dames de la Halle," and he endeavoured to persuade Copeland to produce it. That gentleman was too astute to enter the lists with the Lyceum and the Adelphi. He, however, did produce a piece of Reade's (another Frenchman, or woman rather, founded upon Georges Sand's "Claudie") called "A Village Tale," with the result that, on the very first night, a notice was put up for the theatre to close in a fortnight.*

Mortified at this pronounced failure, out of sheer obstinacy, the Trinity took the theatre on their own responsibility.

Then commenced the first of the numerous theatrical speculations in which my poor friend was so frequently worsted. On the 26th of April he produced his adaptation of "Les Dames de la Halle" under the title of "The Lost Husband" with Mrs Seymour in the part played by Mrs Keeley at the Adelphi, and by Madame Vestris at the Lyceum. To attempt to compete with the magnificent productions of the Lyceum and the Adelphi in a bandbox like the Strand was to court defeat. The result was exactly what Copeland had anticipated, and Reade's first theatrical speculation terminated in a month, involving considerable loss.

He, however, always maintained that "out of the nettle, danger, he had plucked the rose, safety"; and on the strength of this month's appearance at the Strand he obtained several provincial engagements

* This very play was exhumed twenty years later and successfully revived at the Adelphi and the Queen's under the title of "Rachel the Reaper."

for Mrs Seymour, during which she distinguished herself highly both in "The Ladies' Battle" and in "Masks and Faces."

On returning to town he and Taylor completed their noblest play, "Two Loves and a Life," which was produced at the Adelphi in April 1864.

Although beautifully mounted and capitally acted, it never attracted to the extent of its merits either in town or country. As literary work, there can be no doubt that it is far and away in advance of any drama of the same class in this century. There is nothing more touching or more beautiful in the whole range of dramatic literature than the story of Juanita in the second act.

Although the public and the critics never noted it, the treatment of this scene marked a new departure in the actor's art.

Up to this time one of the stereotyped effects of the conventional tragedian was "to tear a passion to tatters" in the narration of certain moving antecedent events by flood and field.

Two notable instances will suffice to illustrate my meaning—*e.g.* Earl Osmond's dream in Monk Lewis's high-falutin' and archaic drama, "The Castle Spectre," and the Count de Valmont's narrative of the sacking of his castle and the abduction of his wife and child in Dimond's "Foundling of the Forest."

I have seen intelligent and excellent actors go almost into convulsions in these two scenes, and, what is more, have seen intelligent audiences so carried away by this absurd exaggeration that the entire house has risen into an absolute frenzy of acclamation.

It was once cynically said of Alfred Wigan (an admirable and accomplished actor in his own department!) that, in attempting Faulconbridge, he had reduced the part to his own standard of incapacity.

It may have been, and probably was, Webster's physical weakness that compelled him to discard

declamation in Father Radcliffe's touching story to Gervase Rookwood, but, whatever the cause, it certainly impressed upon the rising generation of actors the necessity of moderating their tragic transports.

After all these years, I retain the most vivid impression of Webster recalling the supreme moment when love leaped rejoicing to life in the heart of the ascetic Jesuit. I can still see him wave his beautiful hand towards the cruel sea: can still hear that pathetic wail — "Juanita! Juanita! The sea would not give up its dead! Silent! Silent!"

There was no applause, but there was a heart throb which I feel now.

Such, however, is the perversity of public taste, this play was only acted at my theatre in the country, and has never been revived in London since its first production at the Adelphi. For my own part, I had such faith in it that, during the first year I went into management, I expended three or four hundred pounds upon its production, with most direful results. The manager, as well as the author, is unfortunate who is "before his time."

Here were two men of distinguished ability, who had been for a whole year occupied on a great work, which rewarded them with hostile criticism, an apathetic public, and the munificent honorarium of £100!

Reade was one of the most obstinate men in the world, and despite the failure of his managerial experiment at the Strand, was firmly convinced that the theatre was a veritable Tom Tiddler's ground, where managers had nothing to do but to crib French pieces, grind down authors, actors, and actresses, bribe venal hirelings on the press, pick up gold and silver, and live in splendour on their ill-gotten gains. The Trinity was impressed with the same ideas, while both Reade and the Duchess, conscious of their own ability, were bitterly indignant at being kept out of what they considered their rightful inheritance.

They had backed the winner at Ascot and were all over money. The Duchess had cleared a heap, besides which she had a considerable amount to her credit from the American tour.

Reade had made a "bit" too at Ascot, thanks to Seymour's good offices, and had a handsome nest-egg left from the money advanced by his mother.

They had all grown hot upon the Nell Gwynne subject, fully convinced that it would carry everything before it. Money being no object; the main point was to get a theatre. In September 1854 the St James's, then a new and fashionable building in an aristocratic neighbourhood, was to let. Augustus Braham consulted his father (the proprietor), and the family solicitor, and an arrangement was made to open in October.

A powerful company was organised. Miss Glyn, then at her zenith, was retained for Miss Stuart; Mrs Seymour was, of course, Nell Gwynne; George Vandenhoff, Charles the Second; Tom Meade, Richmond; Tom Stuart (the 'caged lion'), played a Major Somebody or other, who was stricken with the plague, and whose realistic acting almost terrified the people out of the house; and Mr Toole made his first appearance in London as Pepys.

The play was powerful and interesting, but sadly needed revision and condensation. The comedy scene between Old Rowley and Nell (founded upon Reade's second interview with Mrs Seymour, when they lighted and made the fire between them) evoked unbounded merriment, but *the* effect of the play was the eulogy upon the Lord Protector (the mighty Oliver) which, beyond all doubt, is the noblest epitaph ever written in the English language.

This work is rarely or ever acted, and is almost unknown to the present generation. I avail myself, therefore, of the license of occasion to quote this magnificent philippic, and to describe the situation in which it occurs.

At one of the deepest periods of shame in our island story, at a period when the Dutch

Admiral, Van Tromp, and his valiant sailors have bombarded Chatham and Sheerness, have burnt our ships to the water's edge and sunk them, have swept the chops of the Channel with a broom at their mast-heads, while their victorious fleet actually lies anchored and unmolested in the Medway, the French King's pensioner, the airy, charming gentleman yclept—God save the mark!—"The Merry Monarch," and his merry satellities are making night shamelessly wanton at an orgie in Spring Gardens. At this instant — while the thunder of the Dutchman's artillery is heard in the palace at Whitehall: while it penetrates the people's palace—the Commons' House at Westminster: while it is heard in Spring Gardens, drowning the bacchanals' song, the roar of the reveller, the ribald laughter of pimps, panders, and harlots, one parasite, more shameless than the rest, calls upon the half-drunken Richmond to drink "To the King!"

With eyes aflame, and heart afire, the indignant nobleman springs to his feet and, trumpet-tongued, exclaims:

"No, gentlemen, no! Those guns have sobered me. They ring the knell of England's honour in my ears! But, I will give you a health — the health that should be drunk to that ignominious music! Fill your glasses, ladies and gentles of the court, for I drink to the memory of a man, by birth a yeoman, and by soul an emperor. Raise your glasses high, dwarfs, for I drink to a giant. Whilst he lived no Dutchman swept our English seas. No Castlemaines dishonoured the high places, and insulted the matrons of the land. Vice and folly trembled at his eye, and all good things lay safe beneath his mighty shadow. He died, and then curs took courage, and tore the great man's body from the tomb—from hallowed ground, but no power can tear him from his immortal sepulchre in England's heart. Honour and reverence to those dismembered bones that were the Protector; ay! the protector of every honest man and chaste

woman in the land; and the scourge of cowardly soldiers, of unchristian prelates, of cut-purse nobles, and lascivious kings!"

Talk about blank verse!

No nobler poetry has been written since the spacious times of great Elizabeth than these soul-stirring lines.

Towards the end of the campaign, Reade produced a comedy of his own entitled "Nobs and Snobs." However, next to the "King's Rival," the most noteworthy event of his management was the production of Captain Spicer's scholarly and admirable adaptation of the "Alcestis."

The season, I fear, also involved a serious loss, to retrieve which Mrs Seymour went once more into the country, supported by a compact and admirable company, amongst which were the Robertson family, including the future dramatist, who, all unconscious of his coming greatness, fulfilled the humble but onerous duties of prompter.

Considering how erratic Reade could be at times, his industry and fecundity at this period was simply marvellous.

Almost immediately after returning from this tour he and Taylor wrote an archaic and almost forgotten play called, "The First Printer," which was produced with questionable success, at the Princess's. This was soon followed by Reade's adaptation of "The Courier of Lyons," which, thanks to the admirable performance of Henry Irving, throbs with life and motion to-day as strongly as it did half-a-century ago under the masterly rendition of Charles Kean.

In one respect, this adaptation is a truly remarkable piece of stagecraft. Most of Reade's dramas are distinguished by prolixity and redundancy, but here, in adapting another man's work, he produced a masterpiece of construction and condensation. Except dear old Palgrave Simpson's adaptation of

Edmund Yates' novel, "Black Sheep" (which is a model of dramatisation), there is nothing on our stage which, for terseness, simplicity, and strength, can compare with Reade's arrangement of the third and fourth acts of the "Courier of Lyons." Although this is a mere expression of individual opinion, it may at least be accepted as an impartial one, since I myself had previously adapted the play; and was, indeed, the original actor of the dual parts in this country; but upon seeing Reade's version I put my own behind the fire, and have never acted it since.

He was now forty years of age, and, as yet, had done nothing to satisfy his ambition; but he knew his own strength, and felt convinced that everything, the world itself, comes round to him who knows how to wait, and who lives long enough. It was at this time he said to his brother Compton: "I am like Goldsmith and Sir Walter: I shall blossom late."

At this crisis in his career the sound, practical common-sense of Mrs Seymour came to the rescue. Having had enough of theatrical speculation, she incessantly urged him to quit the precarious pursuit in which he had been so cruelly baffled, and to devote his great powers and his undivided attention to narrative literature.

He listened in silence, but her words were not wasted. They reminded him of words spoken by another woman who, though she had passed out of his life, had left her mark upon it and upon him.

He retired "into himself" and tried to think out some mode of availing himself of this sympathetic and sagacious advice. At the moment there was no way open.

He would make one: of that he felt quite assured! But how—how? That was the question which exercised his mind from morning till night, but answer never came.

At last it came, in the columns of the *Times*.

This was how he afterwards (26th April 1871)

described, in a letter to the editor of that journal, the source of his inspiration:

"A noble passage in the *Times* of September 7 or 8, 1853, touched my heart, inflamed my imagination, and was the germ of my first important work, 'It is Never too Late to Mend.' That column, a monument of head, heart, and English, stands now dramatised in my pages, embellishing the work which inspired it!"

The moment after he read this article, leaping down stairs, he burst into the Duchess's sanctum, crying: "Found! found! Listen." And he read her the article from beginning to end, while she stood in breathless excitement.

"The duffers thought 'Gold' was dead, but it was only sleeping, and now it's alive!" he exclaimed. "My beautiful Susan is alive! George Fielding, and Levi, and Meadows are alive! Above all, Tom Robinson is alive! I will take him into their inferno and bring him out alive and kicking! I will, by God! I will take him to Australia too, and—but there—there! I'm off to Spottiswoode's for the blue-books, and then, yes then, I'll write, and you shall sit in judgment; and then, then—thank God! Thank God!" and off he ran to Spottiswoode's.

The blue-books set his blood on fire, and with that ever-active sympathy with the suffering and the oppressed, that intense hatred of the wrong-doer, which to the last moment of his life were his most dominant feelings, he girded up his loins to do battle.

A mere pamphlet would not achieve the object in view—blood, brains, life, must be put into the dry bones. Tom Robinson was already in existence, our fiery author made the wretched convict his *cheval de bataille*, and the episode of the model prison was incorporated with the original story of "Gold"!

CHAPTER XII

THE GENESIS OF "IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND"

Four Years' Work—Morning, Noon, and Night—Why and how "Gold" was transmogrified into "It is Never too Late to Mend"—Time and Tide—A severe but sympathetic Critic—A memorable five Minutes in the Black Hole at York Castle—Similar Experiences at Durham, Reading, Oxford, Newgate, and the Model Inferno at Birmingham—How an Artist in Letters gets at his Facts—Excerpts from an old Diary—The word Finis at last—The Book is the Rage of the Hour—Edition follows Edition—Coin does not always bring Content—Pirates spring up on every Hand and surreptitiously dramatise the Book without the Author's Permission—The spurious Versions realise Bushels of Money for the Thieves, but the luckless Author gets nothing but Litigation and Vexation—Pirates triumphant—Woman's Wit to the Rescue—Author Defeats the Robbers and shuts them up—Dramatises the Book himself—Sends his Play to all the Central London Managers, who do not deign to look at it—It lies on the Shelf for Seven Years, when a Young Man from the Country looks in

"THAT book took *four* years morning, noon, and night—out my life. I wrote here, there, everywhere,—in town, at Oxford—laying down a definite plan from which I never departed; always determined to leave nothing to accident, nothing to guess-work."

("*Just now you called it 'Gold.'* Why did you christen it 'Never too Late'?*")

"I didn't. It was the Duchess. I had read her the concluding chapter of the prison episode, whereupon she said: 'I don't like your title. "Gold" only serves to recall a failure.'

* Only so recently as a month ago, Mr Charles L. Reade showed me the first part of the original MS. endorsed by the author in huge sprawling letters "Gold."

"It wasn't a failure! It wasn't!" I blurted out.

"'You say it wasn't, but Smith says it was,' she replied.

"And I say he is a liar!"

"'That goes without saying, but he's not a fool! If he'd been making money, do you think he'd have been such an ass as to take it out of the bill for a miserable eight pounds a week? Not exactly! Anyhow, whether it was a failure or a success, you don't want the world to know that you are dishing up a new novel out of an old play. You've been a long time making up your mind about it; but it's never too late to mend, — so suppose you call it "Better Late than Never"?'

"Not half a bad idea. I'll think about it."

"I did think about it a good deal; but remained undecided some time, for a month or six weeks later, I wrote thus. Listen:

"'I will work hard at my tale of "Gold," whether under that title or another. I will hunt up two men who have lived in Australia. From them I will get real warm facts. I will visit all the London prisons, and get the truth from them for the Robinson business.'

"I did do so, and picked up heaps of valuable information.

"Sometimes I worked quickly, sometimes slowly, always reading chapter after chapter to my Egeria, who sat upon my work and upon me. Heavens, how she did sit upon us!

"'Remember,' said she,

> '"There is a tide in the affairs of men'
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

'Your time and tide have come, and you are fortunate in securing one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest, subject of the time. Everything depends upon how you treat it. Don't worry over it, and, above all, don't hurry it. Make sure of your facts. Don't be too high-falutin', and never use a big word when a little one will do.'

"Although unable to write a line, she could tell how lines should be written and spoken. Though a severe, she was a sympathetic critic, had a wonderful ear, could tell the exact word to delete or interpolate, knew where a line would tell, or where it would fail.

"Then her knowledge of the acted drama, and of the tricks and dodges of the stage, was complete and invaluable. She had marvellous aptitude for the artifices of climax and situation. When I stumbled, she put me on my feet; when I was about to go down in sight of port, she brought me safely into harbour.

"Mark you! if she erred at all 'twas not on the score of clemency, and she didn't hesitate to speak her mind.

"'*That*' was commonplace, '*this*' high-falutin', as for '*the other*,' that wretched snivelling rubbish, you've said it before, so out with it — out with it at once!

"'Stop, stop!—yesterday her hair was burnished gold, now 'tis raven black. It can't be both, unless she dyes or bleaches it!'

"Talk about scissors! she used shears, and when I wrote yards she cut 'em down to inches!

"I was all right so long as I remained in Berkshire, for I am a son of the soil, and know every inch of the wold; but when I got inside the model prison I was lost in the depths of hell, and when I wriggled out and got aboard ship, I found I was only a poor lost land-lubber; and, worse still, when I got to Australia, I was more at sea than I was on shipboard. So I resolved to find it all out for myself. Do you remember when you took me to see York Castle and I got the chap to lock us up in the black hole?"

"*I should think I do. Had we been there five minutes longer I think I should have gone mad.*"

"Well, I went through all that at Durham, at Reading, and Oxford, in Newgate, and even in Birmingham itself, and I wanted to give you a taste

of it that you might feel what Tom Robinson's sensations were, while going through that damnable ordeal.

"Any inaccuracy or exaggeration in describing the tortures those poor devils endured in that inferno would not only have been detrimental to my work but would have rendered it absolutely ridiculous.

"Hand over that diary—no, not that, the other one! Now listen, and disabuse your mind of your delusions about the midnight oil, and learn how an artist in letters sets about his business.

"Here is the first entry in Durham:

"'Aug. 10, '51. I have sketched the plot of an original drama. I am studying for it a little. One of my characters is to be a thief. I have the *entrée* of Durham Gaol, and I am studying thieves. I have got lots of their letters, and one or two autobiographies from the chaplain.'

"That was the first idea of Tom Robinson."

"'*Mem.*—Not to trust this play in any theatre, because there are plenty of blackguards about, and any fool could write a play that would go down upon this subject. I am glad in one way of having written it. I want to show people that, though I adapt French pieces, I can *invent*, too, if I choose to take the trouble; and it *is* a trouble, I confess.'

"Well—I *did* take trouble, and I thought of nothing else by day—dreamt of nothing else by night. I churned it up in my brain-pan, and, months later, wrote this. Hearken! and see how it began to take shape.

"'Having collected material in Durham Gaol, whatever I write about Tom Robinson's gaol will carry (I hope) a physical exterior of truth.

"'George Fielding is going in a ship to Australia. I know next to nothing about a ship; but my brother Bill is a sailor. I have commissioned him to describe, as he would to an intelligent child, a ship sailing with the wind on her beam—then a lull—a change of wind to dead aft, and the process of making all sail upon a ship under that favourable circumstance.

"'Simple as this is, it has never been done in human writing so as to be intelligible to *landsmen.*

"'One of my characters is a Jew—an Oriental Jew. It will be his fate to fall into argument not only with Susan Merton but with the chaplain of my gaol. It will be my business to show what is in the head and in the heart of a modern Jew. This entails the reading of at least eight considerable volumes; but these eight volumes will make my Jew a Truth, please God, instead of a Lie.

"'My story must cross the water to Australia, and plunge after that into a gold-mine. To be consistent with myself, I ought to cross-examine at the very least a dozen men that have farmed, dug, or robbed in that land. If I can get hold of two or three that have really been in it, I think I could win the public by these means. Failing these, I must read books and letters, and do the best I can. Such is the mechanism of a novel by Charles Reade. I know my system is right; but, unfortunately, there are few men so little fitted as myself to work this system. A great capacity for labour is the first essential. Now, I have a singularly small capacity for acquisitive labour. A patient, indomitable spirit the second. Here I fail miserably. A stout heart the third. My heart is womanish. A vast memory the fourth. My memory is not worth a dump.

"'Now, I know exactly what I am worth. If I can work the above great system, there is enough of me to make one of the writers of the day; without it, *No!* No!

"'July 8th. *Magd. Coll.* Spent several hours in Reading Gaol yesterday. I hope that tree will bear fruits.

"'There was one gaol-bird reading the Bible in Hebrew.

"'July 10th. Went to hear the assize sermon and see the judges. Awful to behold! To the Criminal Court to-day. I made myself cry to-day writing a

bit of my story, "Never too Late to Mend." Is that a good sign? Laura Seymour says I have pathos. I suspect I shall be the only one to snivel.

"'July 17th. Went to-day to the chapel of Reading Gaol. There I heard and saw a parson drone the liturgy and hum a commonplace, dry-as-dust discourse to two hundred great culprits and beginners.

"'Most of these men's lives have been full of stirring and thrilling adventures. They are now, by the mighty force of a system, arrested in their course, and for two whole hours to-day were chained under a pump, which ought to pump words of fire into their souls; but this pump of a parson could not do his small share, so easy compared with what the police and others had done in tracking and nabbing these two hundred foxes one at a time. No; the clerical pump would not pump, or could not.

"'He droned away as if he had been in a country parish church. He attacked the difficult souls with a buzz of conventional commonplaces that have come down from book of sermons to book of sermons for the last century, but never in that century knocked at the door of a man in passing—nor ever will.

"'The beetle's drowsy hum!

"'Well, I'm not a parson; but I'll write one, and say a few words in my quiet, temperate way about this sort of thing.

"'But, la! it doesn't become me to complain of others. Look at myself! Can't write "Never too Late to Mend," which is *my business*.'"

At last his exacting but sympathetic critic was satisfied, and the welcome word *finis* was written.

A publisher was found, and at one bound Charles Reade sprang into the foremost rank of living authors.

The critics, when they were not hostile, were, as usual, apathetic; but the great heart of the people

warmed to it, and no wonder, for it is English to the backbone. The men are sons of the soil; Susan Merton is as sweet an English maiden as ever came out of Berkshire; the lines are idyllic English. There is not a pastoral scene in the play either here or in the Antipodes in which the spectator does not "see green meadows, and hear the bleating of sheep," while the crude savage of "Botany Bay" is transformed by the hand of genius into the wonderful creation of the inimitable Jacky.

When this stirring story leaped from the author's brain, it set all English hearts aflame with generous indignation, and instantaneously inaugurated the Parliamentary Commission which tolled the death-knell of the accursed system it assailed.

Although fifty years and more have elapsed since the great author pointed out the horrors of the secret and silent system and pilloried the monster at B——, still much remains to be done, not only for the amelioration of the condition of the wretched criminal, but for the protection of the poor but honest debtor. We move slowly in England, and perchance in another half-century we shall have learned to treat our prisoners like human beings, "fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer" as ourselves.

Yet a hundred, or twice a hundred years hence, surely, Charles Reade will be remembered as the only human being, who, since the days of Howard and Fry, had the courage to denounce this infernal system.

Despite his sympathies with the peccant Robinson and the hapless Josephs no sickly sentiment found place in that virile nature, and were he to the fore now — now, while triumphant Hooliganism rides rough-shod over our streets, defying law and order, adding outrage to pillage, and murder to both—he would be heard to thunder forth: "Wake up!—wake up! *Where is the Cat?*"

He had kept his word to his brother—"he had blossomed late."

"Better late than never, old man!" he exclaimed.

Jubilant as he was at this moment, there was one thing wanting to complete his happiness. His mother had never got over her disappointment at his not being a Bishop. Indeed, when Samuel Wilberforce (who had been curate at Checkenden Chalk Dene) became Bishop of Oxford, the old lady said, somewhat bitterly: "Ah, Charles, you might have been there if you had only taken the trouble."

He sent her as a birthday present the first copy published of "It is Never too Late to Mend." Evidently she rejoiced in his success, for she said: "Your book is better than a sermon, and I am proud of my boy, though, alas! he has not blossomed into a Bishop."

The first edition hung fire, but with the second success was assured. Edition followed edition (old prices—a guinea and a half the three volumes), and before he had reached fifty he had acquired both fame and fortune.

But—there is always a *but*!

The Boucicault revolutionary *régime* was in full swing. The "Colleen Bawn" was attracting all London and the country, and coining money for the lucky author, who, by this one play, amassed one of those small fortunes which he spent even more rapidly than he acquired it.

The Duchess had known him in America, hence he and Reade became friends. Dion never hid his light under a bushel, and it was mortifying to find that he had monopolised the ground while Reade could not even get a look in. It was the absolute torture of Tantalus; and amidst his continually-increasing successes as a novelist he still hungered for the glamour of the footlights and the applause of the audience, and was never happy out of the theatre. With this feeling ever dominant, circumstances now occurred which were peculiarly aggravating. The great and continually increasing

popularity of "It is Never too Late to Mend" attracted the attention of the minor theatre dramatists, and, without saying "with your leave" or "by your leave," various unauthorised dramatisations of the novel were produced in town and country, which crowded the theatres nightly, and replenished the managerial coffers, while not a cent ever found its way to the pocket of the original author. To a less irascible man this would have been annoying enough; but it incensed Reade almost to madness. He had given his best work to the theatre; had been repeatedly baffled and defeated; had lost time and money—and yet, on the very first occasion when he had "struck oil," a horde of pirates and plunderers rushed in, robbed him with impunity, and made heaps of money and *kudos* by the nefarious transaction. Justly angered at this iniquitous state of affairs, he commenced the prolonged litigation which ultimately settled the question of dramatic copyright as it now stands.

The judges had decided, in the first instance, that the author had no exclusive right to the dramatisation of his own novel. Always baffled, often beaten, Reade was about to abandon the fight in despair, when Mrs Seymour suggested to him that "It is Never too Late to Mend" was (except the prison episode) founded upon his own dead and buried drama "Gold." "Now," said the shrewd little woman, "the law which permits the pirates to rob you of your novel surely will not allow them to steal your play!"

Acting on this happy inspiration he changed his front, and commenced proceedings anew—not, indeed, for compensation (to which he was justly entitled for past robbery), but for protection in the future, by making his rights absolute in the drama of "Gold."

The result was that the pirates were shut up, spurious versions of the play were inhibited, and a verdict given which laid down the law: "that if an author will take the trouble to dramatise, however

crudely, his narrative prior to its publication, his rights are absolute."

Such was the law laid down in the case of Reade *v.* Conquest, but the specious decision of Mr Justice Stirling *in re* the piratical dramatisation of Mrs Burnett's story, "Little Lord Fauntleroy," left the matter more confused and more confounded than ever.

Is it too much to expect that the collective wisdom of English authors shall draft a short Bill, clearly defining and making absolute the author's right in his own property, and that some sympathetic M.P. will undertake to pilot it through the House next session?

Although successful in pillorying the pirates the victory was a barren one.

In speaking of it long after, he said: "I shut the thieves up, it's true, but couldn't make 'em disgorge the plunder.

"Then when I wrote my own play, had it printed and sent round to every manager in London, not one of the blockheads would even look at it. For seven long years it lay on the shelf, and might have been lying there now if you——"

Then he said things pleasant to hear, pleasanter still to recollect, but, "On their own merits modest men are dumb," hence I forbear to repeat them, and devote the remainder of this narrative to the record of our twenty years' intimacy.

End of Book the First

Book the Second

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND"

"Thus mem'ry oft in dreams sublime
Takes a glimpse of the days that are over,
Thus weeping looks through the waves of time
And the long-faded glories they cover."

Book the Second

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND

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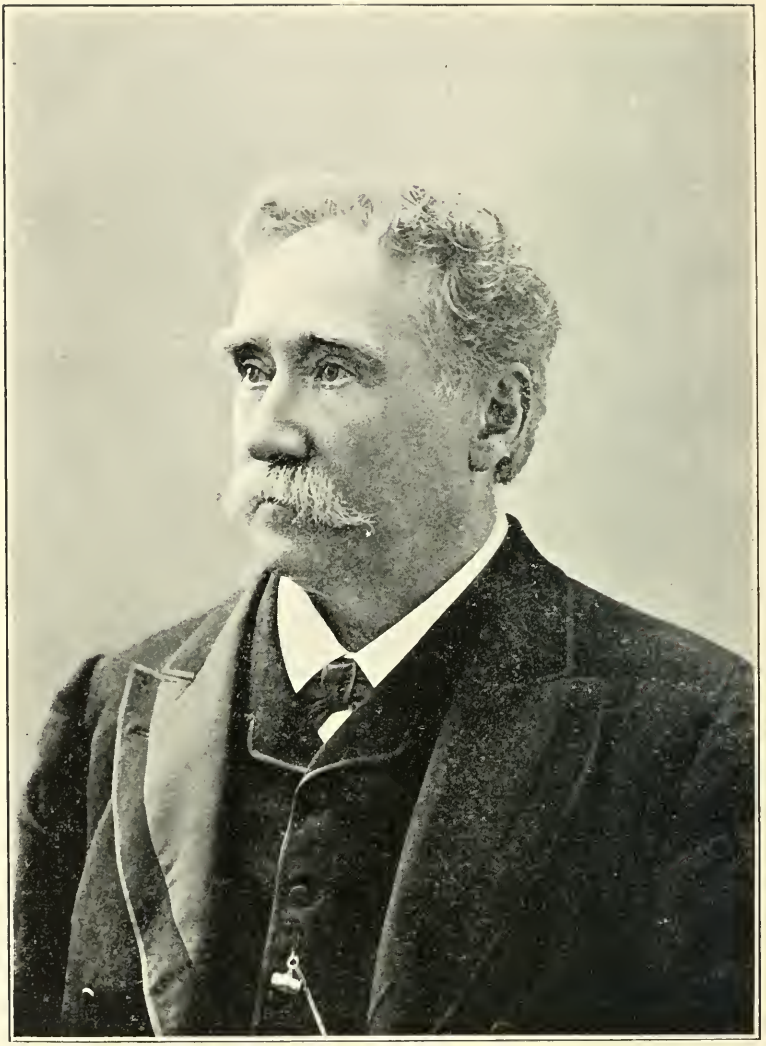

Photo by Alfred Ellis]

JOHN COLEMAN

CHAPTER I

THE PLAY—"THE PLAY'S THE THING!"

Rehearsals at Leeds — Author and Manager agree to differ—It clears the Air — A domestic Calamity at Rehearsal — *Exit* George — "Double" gets us over one Difficulty — The irate Author lands us in another—The Olive-Branch — The Drama *v.* the local Press — The London Press — The Tykes speak their Mind — Banquet to the Author — An artistic Triumph but a financial Failure—The Future of the Play in Danger — Loss upon Loss — Threatened Withdrawal—Despair of the Author

"THE obsolete drama of "Gold," which in my boyish arrogance I had disdained, now brought me into immediate communication with the author of "It is Never too Late to Mend," and led to the intimacy which existed to the day of his death.

In the relations in which we were placed there was, indeed, frequent friction, but that was of the slightest and most temporary character, and no more than might naturally be expected from two men of equally impetuous temperaments and different opinions. But, except at our very first rehearsals, we scarcely had the slightest difference on the subject of the management of the stage—over which, in every instance, I exercised complete control, arranging and inventing the entire stage business of "It is Never too Late to Mend," and other pieces, exactly as they now exist.

Prior to Reade's arrival in Leeds, I had taken the precaution to have half-a-dozen preliminary rehearsals, during which I had carefully and elaborately arranged the dramatic action, the

music, and the proper rendition of the text, in which I insisted on the company being letter perfect.

I had hoped by these means to have provided him with an agreeable surprise. Alas! it proved to be quite the reverse.

He had been so accustomed to the slipshod system, during which the actors sprawled listlessly about the stage, comparing their parts the first week, squabbling over situations the next, always loose in the text until the last, that when he found the people perfect in the words, and going straight on without the aid of a prompter, he called a halt.

"I understood these rehearsals were to be subject to my approval!" he growled.

"So they are!" I replied. "Our preliminary rehearsals were intended to spare you time and trouble. Permit us to go on, and when we fall short of your wishes say so."

"But it is all so strange—so unusual."

"To you—but not to me, sir."

"Well, well, go on."

"Don't hesitate to stop us when we are wrong."

"I sha'n't hesitate!" he replied, sharply.

His evident irascibility somewhat embarrassed us, but our earnestness, and our firmness in the text, and the generally accurate reading of it, left little room for finding fault.

Just as we had finished the first act a telegram was handed to George Fielding, who appeared disconcerted, and immediately disappeared in great agitation.

When the scene was set for the prison act, the author began to let off steam.

He wanted a treadmill at back, with prisoners ascending and keeping it in motion.

I had taken the trouble to go to Birmingham and to Ainley, and found that in neither one place nor the other could a view of the treadmill be possible from any of the cells in which the prisoners were immured. This, coupled with my rooted aver-

sion to the revolting realism of the incident, decided me to omit it. He alleged that I was bound by contract to provide it. I maintained that I was not; and on reference to the contract it was found I was right. Victory number one for me.

The front scene, however, was really an agreeable surprise to the author. Instead of an ordinary "drop"-scene there was a "set," including a real practical window to the governor's office, in which the ruffian Hawes sat installed.

When we came to the double-action scene representing the cells, in one of which the wretched Robinson is confined, and the other in which the poor boy Josephs is immured and done to death, I asked Reade to go round and see it from the front, begging him to let us finish it without interruption, and to make any suggestions or alteration he desired afterwards.

At the end of the act he came round, pale and breathless, mopping his head.

"Tremendous!" he gasped. "But will *they* stand it—that's the question? I never taste spirits—hate the very smell of the beastly stuff!—but, for God's sake, let me have a spoonful of brandy!"

There were breakers ahead in the next act, for George Fielding was *non est*, and no one had seen him.

We waited for half-an-hour. Then the prompter had to read the part, which put us all out. However, we got to the end of the act as well as we could, and then made a dash for the last, getting through the first scene without interruption.

In the next, however, when the cue was given for George Fielding's advance, the truant turned up and strode on to the stage. A strange, weird figure he looked. His face was pale as death, his eyes as if about to burst forth in flames. Evidently he had fallen in the gutter; for his coat was all over sludge, his boots and trousers splashed up to the knees. Taking off his hat, he made a comprehensive bow to everybody, then smiled, and remained silent.

There was a dead stand-still. The prompter prompted, so did I. George merely shook his head and smiled again.

"Go on!" I whispered, impatiently.

He bowed again, and gasped: "Domestic calamity, gentlemen, domestic calamity!"

"No—no," interrupted the prompter, "not a bit like it."

"Give him the word!" said Reade, impatiently. "The word is——"

"Domestic calamity — gentlemen — domestic calamity," continued George, still smiling.

Although puzzled as to whether this was drink or dementia, or both combined, I tried to persuade him to go on with the part.

Apparently he did not comprehend, for the only answer I could get was, "domestic calamity."

"Mad!" whispered Reade.

"Call a cab and get him home," said I, to the call-boy.

We had some difficulty in persuading George to leave the stage. When my brother and Mr Towers, our stage manager, had, with still greater difficulty, coaxed him into the cab at the stage-door the poor fellow thrust into my hands a crumpled telegram, still muttering:

"Domestic calamity, governor!—domestic calamity!"

Smoothing it out in the porter's lodge I read:

"Emily has bolted with that scoundrel Ventnor to New York. They sailed last night by the *Etruria* from Queenstown."

Then came a sound like the shriek of a wounded horse—a piercing cry of "Em'ly!"—a scuffle in the cab, and a dead silence.

"John," whispered my brother, "he has fallen in a fit."

Mounting the box I told the cabby to drive quickly to the Infirmary. I might have spared him

the trouble; for, when we got there, we found our poor friend's troubles were over!

Regret for the dead doesn't absolve one from duty to the living, so we drove to the Queen's Hotel, where Reade awaited us.

When he learned what had occurred he merely said, "Poor fellow! Gone to Heaven, I trust. Let us hope that damnable creature and her paramour have gone to—ahem!—the other place!"

To which we replied with a devout "Amen!"

"What's to be done now?" he inquired.

"If you don't object to a 'double,' there'll be no difficulty," I replied.

"What do you propose?"

"My brother, here, who plays Eden, will take George; and Mr Towers, who does Levi, who is *not* on in the second act, can easily double Eden, who is only on *in* that act.

"A capital idea."

"Excuse me, then,—till to-morrow at eleven."

"At eleven. Good-night, gentlemen."

In a couple of days we had got over our difficulties, and all went smoothly till we came to our final rehearsal. Reade had taken an aversion (an unreasonable one!) to the old gentleman who played Farmer Merton, and kept continually nagging at him till the poor old boy got nervous and hysterical, and ultimately broke down in an important speech in the last scene. Then the irate author said something which I prefer not to recall.

There was a dead silence. Then Mr Merton came forward, and placing his part in the hands of the stage-manager said—"Permit me to resign my part, I am only too well aware I am not a great actor, but I am a man! I have lived all these years without being subject to insult, and it's too late to begin now." So saying he took off his hat, bowed, and left the stage.

"Why don't you go on?" demanded Reade, irritably.

"Because we can't unless you cut out Merton?" replied the stage-manager, brusquely.

"The rehearsal is dismissed for half-an-hour," said I; "and please ask Mr Merton to come to my room."

It was in vain that I tried to dissuade the old gentleman from sending in his resignation. I might as well have spoken to a tombstone.

"You know, sir, I would carry on a banner for you. I will do anything for you—but this. You've known me for twenty years and never known me give or take an insult."

Finding the actor obdurate I tackled the author; but when I suggested an apology, he fired up. Fortunately, at this moment Mrs Coleman came upon the stage, and changed the tone of the conversation, while Reade walked out of the theatre with her over Leeds Bridge.

Meanwhile, Towers tried to induce one or other of the small people to come to the rescue, but their sympathies were entirely with Merton and one and all refused.

The half-hour expired—five minutes—ten minutes. Then Reade walked upon the stage, and, advancing with dignity, accosted me. "Sir," said he, "it appears I let slip a hasty expression just now. I'm sorry for it." Then, lifting his hat and addressing Merton, he continued, "I beg your pardon, sir."

Poor old Merton took the proffered hand, bending low over it. Then Reade, brightening up, resumed:

"And now, I suppose, we may finish the rehearsal."

This difficulty surmounted, we reached the eventful night, which reminds me how imperfectly I kept a record of it.

Some proud blood which I inherit made me somewhat disdainful of the artifices which have since become part and parcel of the managerial stock-in-trade,—hence, the history of the *première* of "It is Never too Late to Mend" has never been written until this day.

Photo by Bertin, Brighton]

MISS GRACE LEIGH

(MRS JOHN COLEMAN)

THE ORIGINAL SUSAN MERTON

At that particular period all Yorkshire could boast but one daily paper—the *Leeds Mercury*, an important sectarian journal with great influence, and a rabid hostility to the drama as an art, and to the theatre as an institution.

It was currently rumoured, and indeed believed, that this hostility arose in the first instance from an hereditary feud, commencing with the ancestor of the proprietor of the *Mercury*, one Baines—who, a hundred years ago, printed the play-bills and kept the keys of the theatre—and the eccentric and renowned *impresario* Tate Wilkinson, who built it.

The legend ran that Wilkinson withdrew his custom and the custody of the theatre: that Baines resented it, that they became mortal enemies, and hence there was a hereditary feud between the proprietors of the *Mercury* and the proprietors of the theatre.

That a quarrel may have occurred between them is possible: the rest is sheer nonsense. The hostility of the *Mercury* to the drama arose from mere sectarian bias and puritanical prejudice against the art which amuses, enlightens, and refines.

Whatever the cause of "this effect defective" it is quite certain that the Baines family did not disdain to earn "the mammon of unrighteousness" from theatrical advertisements, which were inserted amongst others of a more questionable character. Yet, although they gave graphic accounts of local prize-fights, and other delectable entertainments, they never condescended to sully their pages by noticing the existence of the theatre. Hence, the only existent account of the *première* of "It is Never too Late to Mend" appeared in the special correspondence of the *Era* which is here quoted in full.

PRODUCTION OF MR CHARLES READE'S NEW PLAY OF "IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND," AT THE LEEDS THEATRE ROYAL

"Mr Boucicault's play of 'Arrah na Pogue' was

first produced in Dublin; Mr Watts Phillips's last work first saw the light in Liverpool; and now Mr Charles Reade selects Leeds, of all places in the world, for the first representation of his new drama.

"Many circumstances combined to invest the production of this play with unusual interest.

"It will be within the recollection of our readers that, immediately after the remarkable success of Mr Reade's entrancing book, a number of dramatic adaptors constructed from it a variety of dramas, which were acted at the principal theatres, attracting large sums of money for the managers, though not one farthing accrued to the original author. Some of these gentlemen appear, however, to have been oblivious to the fact that, some years before, Mr Reade had produced a drama at Drury Lane called 'Gold,' which was, in fact, the ground-work of the present story. The existence of this play enabled him to put a stop to the representation of all unauthorised adaptations of his work. It then naturally occurred to the author of 'Masks and Faces,' 'Two Loves and a Life,' etc. that he was not altogether disqualified from adapting his own story to the stage. Having done so, he looked round for a company in London fitted to adequately represent it. Failing to find one he decided to try the experiment in the provinces; and was fortunate enough to find a manager of sufficient enterprise to produce the work, and actors of sufficient ability to embody the characters. Hence, the present production, the result of which must certainly have exceeded the author's expectations: inasmuch as a success more brilliant and complete has seldom been achieved anywhere.

"Of the drama itself, we may say that it is, without exception, the best type of English rural life the stage has yet given to us. It takes but little stretch of the imagination 'to see green meadows and hear the bleating of sheep.' Good parts abound; indeed, there are so many that the resources of any company must be severely taxed to do them justice. Each

act develops a new, interesting, and strongly contrasted interest: the simple pathos of George Fielding's early struggles serving only to invest the gloom of the prison with a deeper interest; while the romantic episode in Australia makes the heart yearn toward home and fatherland, where the story ends as happily as it commenced sadly.

"This is not an 'apex' play. Now, it is well known that Mr Coleman is an 'apex' actor—that is to say, he is one of those actors who monopolise the best part in every piece; and it is generally understood that it is on this account he has hitherto confined to the provinces abilities which would be sure to meet with a much higher appreciation in London. We were, therefore, not a little delighted to find that, for once, this gentleman had condescended to act with more self-abnegation than usually pertains to him, by assuming the character of Robinson. Nor do we think his reputation will suffer thereby. It ought not; for he threw himself, heart and soul, into the performance; indeed, he played several parts in one. Executing with vigour the author's whole design, he was by turns mercurial, dejected, savage, desperate, and penitent. It is worth observing, too, that with fine discrimination he made his many changes in dress and deportment mark the gradual improvement in the penitent thief's moral character. Mr Mathews was earnest and intelligent as Meadows, but a trifle too slow and conventional. Mr Edward Coleman lacks inches of the heroic standard: but if actors were measured by their intelligence he would be six feet high. This young man has a handsome face and a sympathetic voice, and really played George Fielding with a happy mixture of manliness and tenderness. Mr Walmsley, late stage-manager of the Royalty, played Crawley (without doubt the great part of the piece, and evidently written for poor Robson), and although we cannot congratulate him upon the success of the delirium tremens scenes, still he achieved a decided success. Mr Loome gave weight and dignity to a most important,

though revolting part. A young actor named Henry, whom we do not remember to have seen so prominently placed before, acted William Fielding, and won one of the heartiest rounds of applause in the whole play by the manliness with which he spoke one speech in the first act. Mr Calhaem (of Drury Lane, the Lyceum, Adelphi, etc.) enacted Jacky, the aboriginal Australian, with even more than his usual skill. A more happy embodiment of the author's idea it is impossible to conceive. The only thing to be regretted is that the part is so short, Jacky appearing only in the third act. Short as it is, Mr Calhaem's reputation can rest on no firmer basis than this admirable performance.

"Mr Johnson Towers (formerly manager of the Victoria Theatre) did double duty: appearing as Isaac Levy (the Jew) and Mr Eden (the young clergyman), and succeeded not only in impersonating two entirely different embodiments, but in imparting a distinct individuality to each.

"Miss Clara Dillon, as Josephs, gave convincing proof that she is worthy the name she bears: Belphegor's daughter has her father's natural gift of pathos and her mother's charm of naïvete.

"The part of Susan Merton is but a sketch; yet in this sketch centres the whole feminine interest of the piece. It could not have had a more charming representative than Miss Grace Leigh, who always excels in parts where pathos and womanly feeling predominate.

"The minor parts were all carefully and intelligently rendered; and the entire dramatic action evinced the presence of a master hand: the whole of the piece being produced under the superintendence of Mr Coleman; while the last three or four rehearsals had the advantage of the personal supervision of the author himself.

"The scenery by Mr Vinning, the young artist of the establishment, is admirably designed and charmingly executed. Each act comprises at least one set, to insure the completeness of which all the

wings and flats have been removed, and the scenes are thoroughly built up. The effect is as novel as it is striking.

"We may congratulate the author on the excellence of his play, and the manager not only on the skill and artistic ability displayed on its production but on the prospect of a great commercial success.

"On Ash-Wednesday Mr Coleman entertained a numerous party of literary and artistic friends, including some of the principal members of his company, at the Queen's Hotel, for the purpose of congratulating Mr Reade on the triumph of the piece. The health of the distinguished guest was proposed in a very felicitous manner by Mr Coleman, and Mr Reade responded in eloquent and feeling terms, stating, in conclusion, that he did not really know a theatre in the country where his play could have been better acted."—From the *Era*, 12th March 1865.

"The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Hence, despite the favourable reception of the play, we never acted for a single week to our current expenses during the entire run at Leeds.

The fact was, the piratical version had preceded us by only a month or two at the minor theatre, and had taken the wind out of our sails.

The work, however, made its mark, and the audience received the author, as well as the actors, with an enthusiasm beyond description.

Reade had many triumphs afterwards, but never one which left a more vividly pleasant recollection than the demonstration on that occasion.

It was the first time he had been an object of popular enthusiasm, and he exulted in it as though he were a very boy!

Years after he was wont to say: "You play-actors didn't have it all your own way then! No, sir! The Tykes remembered there was an author

as well as an actor, and that if there had been no author there would have been no actors!

When Kean's wife inquired what Lord Essex said of his 'Shylock,' on his first night at Drury Lane, the little man replied: "D—n Lord Essex! The pit rose at me!" But on my first night at Leeds the pit did more! They not only "rose at me" at the end of the second act, but at the end of the play the whole house "rose" in a roar which shook the building from its base to the summit, till I thought the roof would have tumbled down about my ears! Ah! those Leeds "loiners" know a good thing when they see it, and they know how to applaud, too, when they give their minds to it!

The "loiners" were not always in so genial a mood; indeed, they were "nothing if not critical."

A certain London tragedian, more distinguished for his bulk than his brains, was trying Claude Melnotte for the first time before them. The play was going about as badly as it could go when it occurred to the "star's" "business manager" to give the performance a fillip. So, planting himself, his bill inspector, and baggage man at the back of the pit, when the curtain fell they began to sing out loudly for Claude. Instead of following suit, the pit "rose" not at the actor but at the "business manager." Turning their backs to the stage, they roared: "Shut up! We've seen this play acted here."

(*Exeunt* "business manager" and assistants, in a hurry.)

I myself have received one or two awkward rebuffs at their hands.

At one period of my career my efforts were principally confined to the Shakespearean drama; but one can't always be acting Shakespeare, so I wrote a play for myself of a sensational character, which for a time had considerable vogue.

While acting it for a week in one of the principal Yorkshire towns I strolled into the market-place on market day, and stumbled upon a cheap Jack selling a Shakespeare and a bust of the bard.

"Look here, lads!" he bawled. "Here's t' buick o' buicks and t' mon o' men! No Yorkshire lad's cottage is compleat wi'out t' buick and t' bard. T' buick and t' mon were not for an aage but for aw' toime! Ah!" (catching sight of me) "here's a chap can tell ye mair aboawt boath on 'em in a minit than oi can in a month! Luick heare, Measter John," he continued, pointing to the bust, "that is, if thou canst luick an owd friend i'd feace, wi'out a blush! Luick heare at God-inspired chap wi'd bald nob who made thee what thou art, and who thou'st dropped like a hot tater for thy beastly, blood-and-thunder, penny plain and tuppence colored sweepin o' owd Tommy Wild's show at Hunslet fair. I wonder thou'st not ashamed o' thysen!"

I was, and bolted, leaving the orator at it!

Upon another occasion I had produced Boucicault's latest sensation "After Dark," not with my own company (which I had sent to Birmingham), but with the Birmingham company, a very excellent one, comprising Miss Bella Pateman and her husband, Mr Harry Paulton, and a number of competent actors, who subsequently became persons of importance in London.

The piece was an awful failure, death-stricken the first night.

I sat in the pit when the railway sensation occurred.

The train went thundering by, and was received with a volley of execrations.

When your Tyke execrates you can hear him!

That sound was the death-knell of the piece, and meant a loss of three or four hundred pounds for the luckless manager.

I suppose I didn't look particularly elate.

A pitite coming out caught sight of me, and, by way of consolation, remarked: "Eh, John lad, thou'st mayst well luick asheamed o' thysen. Yon sort o' muck may do for Lunnun, but t'wunna do for Hunslet Laane!"

Although "It is Never too Late to Mend" "did for Hunslet Laane," the receipts didn't do for me; and having lost as much as I could afford, and more, upon the play, it had to be withdrawn. For both our sakes I would not acknowledge a defeat, so, in order to wind up the affair with *éclat*, I gave the dinner, before referred to, to Reade at the Queen's Hotel, and invited upwards of a hundred friends to meet him. The toast of his health, which I proposed in the most genial terms I could improvise, was drank with great effusion. Although public speaking was not one of his accomplishments he responded in a very appropriate and happy manner. But neither play—nor players—nor banquet sufficed to open the doors of the Adelphi or the Princess's, and the dubious success of "Gold" stopped the way at Old Drury. It was evident we could not get into London for months.

Reade was in despair. The outlook was hopeless, and the piece seemed doomed to certain death.

CHAPTER II

DEFEAT CHANGED TO VICTORY

To Manchester by the Mail—A Celebrity of Cottonopolis—"The Man with the Marble Heart," otherwise Mr "Mun-be-Done"—Charles Mathew's famous Visit to Lancaster Castle leads to the Law-Suit "Coleman *v.* Knowles." — We bury the Hatchet over a Bottle and a Haunch of Mutton, and agree to transfer "It is Never too Late" from Leeds to the Theatre Royal, Manchester, where it achieves a great Success—Tour of the Provinces terminates in a "Blaze of Triumph" in the Land of Joseph the Great, and the City of the Model Prison, in which Josephs was done to Death—Defeat of Lord Dundreary by Leah, which leads to another Law-Suit, in which we are non-suited

The failure was inexplicable in face of the remarkable enthusiasm displayed nightly by the scanty audiences.

It was by no means pleasant for the author—and very unpleasant for the manager. The piece had been produced at considerable expense: the monetary loss alone, exclusive of my services, amounted to upwards of £1000, besides which (a most unusual thing for me at that period) I had the mortification of playing to bad houses, which was most compromising to my reputation.

I could, however, cut my loss and have done with it.

With Reade it was a different matter.

"If it gets into the air that the piece is a 'frost' it's bottled up, and those d—d asses, the London managers, will never look at it! What's to be done?" he ruefully inquired.

"I don't know," I replied. "I only know I've done all I could to make it a success, and have lost as much as I can afford."

"You don't mean to say you are going to desert me now?"

"Not if you can show me any reasonable possibility of retrieving the situation."

"I can't! Drury Lane is no go; Adelphi full up; and Boucicault is in for a great go at the Princess's with 'Arrah na Pogue.' He was in a worse plight at Dublin than we are now. 'Arrah' was a cruel 'frost' there, artistically as well as financially. He kept it dark, revised and rewrote, turned it into a new piece, and now it is going to be done at the Princess's. If we could only hold on, we might get a look in there by-and-by. Think! is there no way out of this hole?"

"Only one—a provincial tour."

"Where?"

"In the big towns: Manchester, Liverpool, Bath, and Bristol, and, above all, in Birmingham, where your hell-hole is."

"A capital idea. Where shall we begin?"

"Depends on where we can get in. For choice I prefer Manchester."

"Why?"

"Because it stands next to London. I'll run over to-morrow and see Mr 'Mun-be-Done.'"

"And who the deuce is he?"

"The manager, John Knowles."

"What do you mean by Mun-be-Done?"

"*He* means it. There's no arguing with him. If he wants a thing done, he says: 'It mun be done,' and done it is, there and then."

"A rough diamond, evidently."

"The roughest you ever came across. Anyhow, I'll have a 'wrostle' with him to-morrow. You'd better come with me."

"Nothing I should like better."

"Very well, then, we'll go at once, by to-night's mail. I'll telegraph him to meet us at the theatre at nine to-morrow."

When we were on our way to Manchester I said: "I fear there'll be a difficulty with 'Mun-be-Done.'"

"The deuce! How's that?"

Then I explained what I here recount briefly for the benefit of the reader.

Mr John Knowles was so unique and remarkable a personality that a vignette of him is worth preserving.

In addition to being a manager, he was a marble merchant, a connoisseur in art and antiquities, a picture-dealer, a speculator, and a born financier. In effect, he was the only financial head existent at that time in the managerial fraternity.

Although he knew less about the art of acting than he did about the sister arts he knew what pleased the public, and possibly that is the most important thing for a manager to know.

In business—*i.e.* the business of the theatre, he was arrogant and overbearing; and ruled the actors with a rod of iron. He was never seen to set foot on the stage at a rehearsal, and was never known to exchange the ordinary courtesies of life with the members of his company—many of them did not know him by sight—others, who did, were for years in the company without presuming to accost him. Occasionally, indeed, he might do one of the ladies (if she happened to be clever, young, and interesting!) the honour of introducing himself, but this was of rare occurrence.

The newspaper people he despised—detested—and was never known to offer them the slightest courtesy, and, whenever the chance presented itself, these gentlemen never omitted the opportunity to have a slap at him; but his position was so assured that their praise or blame were alike indifferent to him.

I must plead guilty to having been the author of a sobriquet, which clung to him like the shirt of Nessus—viz. "The Man with the marble Heart." When I knew him better, I could have wished to recall it, for, brusque and even repellent to the verge of brutality as he was in business, he was genial and the soul of hospitality in his home.

He certainly found his system answer, inasmuch

as for many years his theatre was not only the most prosperous but one of the best conducted in the kingdom.

It was alleged by old Mancastrians that before he became manager of the Theatre Royal he had tried his hand at many things; amongst others, had been driver of the mail coach to Buxton. One thing, however, was quite certain, that when the Roxby Fountain got into difficulties at the old theatre in Beverleys Street, he came to the rescue, and advanced a "bit."

Having once got in, he never got out—but the Roxbys did; and when the old theatre came down and they retired to the North, he succeeded in getting the new theatre erected, stuck to it, and was for many years not only the autocrat of Manchester but of London to boot.

He advanced a "bit" to "Buckey," a "bit" to E. T. Smith, a "bit" to Charles Dillon, a "bit" to Falconer and Chatterton, a "bit" to Charles Mathews, and had them all more or less under his thumb.

The "bits" were never advanced in coin, the circulating media being slips of blue paper and bill stamps, which were duly discounted by a "friend in the city" at ten per cent.

If the acceptor failed to come to the scratch, renewals were granted, subject to engagements in town for protégées, engagements in the country of distinguished actors on easy terms for him, but sometimes rather hard ones for the defaulter.

At one of these periods of stress Knowles had sent Mathews to me, had driven a very hard bargain, and got his "pound of flesh, cut from my very heart."

Shortly afterwards 'twas my turn. I had engaged Mathews for a month. My contract was with Knowles who personally guaranteed the fulfilment of the engagement. One day I had been over to Preston to arrange the programme with Charley, and had a delightful time. Returning to Manchester after dinner, I stopped at St Helens for an hour or more to see Barry Sullivan, who had applied to me for an engagement; made one of a

select audience of about a dozen to witness an act of "The Lady of Lyons"; and concluded *not* to engage Barry. On my arrival in Cottonopolis I found a telegram from the airy Charley awaiting me to this effect:

"'Nailed' half-an-hour after you left. Shall be in Lancaster Castle for the next month. Don't expect me in Norwich. See 'Mun-be-Done' and arrange best you can."

Thinking it possible to help my poor friend out of this dilemma I went next day to Lancaster. Accustomed as he was to laugh his troubles off, on this occasion he didn't even try. A heap of detainers had come in, so there was nothing for it but to make a clean slate, and I left him with a heart heavy as his own.

When I saw Knowles that night with the view of arranging matters amicably, he laughed, cheeked me, and told me to go to law or—a warmer place.

I "went" for him, and he had to "shell out," and didn't like it.

A short time after I met him at the Tavistock.

"Luik here, young shaver," said he, "thou'rt the only play-actor that ever took a rise out o' John Knowles, and thou shalt never act in my theatre again—never, by gum!"

When I had explained our feud to Reade, I said: "You see my difficulty. He will object to my acting in the play."

"Then what the devil's the use of dragging me to Manchester at this unearthly hour?"

"Well, you see, I'm not the only actor in the world."

"Possibly! but you're the only Tom Robinson I see at present."

"Nonsense! I can get quite as good a man for £10 a week."

"When I see it I'll believe it. Meanwhile, I should like to know where *I* come in."

"In dividing the responsibility and the profit."

"How?"

"When he objects to me, as he is sure to do, I'll propose to hire the theatre for a certainty, and you must be prepared to plank down the rent. *Per contra*, I'll provide as much and more than you, including new scenery, etc., and I'll organise an entirely new company."

"I'd rather have the old one. I'm sure of them."

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Why? Can't you see I've half-a-dozen theatres, and cannot possibly dispense with my own company out of my own theatres."

"But we shall have to begin *de novo*. Rehearsals, music, scenery, and God knows what all!"

"Don't you trouble about that — leave that to me!"

"You are the most cocksure young gentleman I ever met with."

"All right. Now excuse me if I take forty winks till we get to Manchester."

On the morning of our interview Knowles turned up in his usual summer costume—a morning jacket or coatee, a loose necktie and collar, and a pair of grey unmentionables.

At this time he was about fifty, but as wiry and elastic as if he had been five-and-twenty. His hair and whiskers were grey and curling, his eyes like steel, bulldog jaws, and a mouth fixed like a vice.

"Well, young shaver," he began, "what's in t' wind?"

"Allow me to introduce my friend, Mr Charles Reade."

"Ay, ay, — 'Never-too-Late' chap. How are ye, sir, how are ye? And now cum to cues, John. Time's brass, and I'm doo at marble works at ten. What's up, and what dost want?"

When I explained my business, he replied:

"Didn't I tell 'ee a year ago thou shouldst never act in my theatre again?"

"But I'm not going to act in your blessed theatre?"

"But you acted t' convict chap i' your own shop."

"True. But I'm not going to do it in yours."

"Then why the blazes dost come wasten' my time?"

"Because I'm going to send a new company here."

"Like thy d——d cheek! No! If the thing *is* done here—moind, I say, *if* it *is* done—it mun be done with the whole bag o' tricks, and thou mun play Tom—what's t' beggar's name—Robinson thysen!"

"I can't!"

"Can't be hanged! Tell 'ee it 'Mun be done'!"

"But the piece doesn't depend on me. I'll mount it splendidly—bring a rattling company."

"Na, na! Thou must cum thysen or I'm off!"

"That's the last word then?"

"T'last."

"Very well, then, I shall go to the Queen's!"

"Thou canst go to —— if thou lik'st!"

Here Reade took up his cue.

"Don't lose your temper, Mr Knowles," said he.

"I'm not losin' my temper; but if this young viper thinks to ride rough-shod over me — me, John Knowles—he's mista'en. I'll see him——"

"Will you take a rent?"

"Eh? a certainty?"

"A certainty."

"And brass down?"

"Brass down."

"Now you talk business, Misther 'Never-too-Late.' Never too late—a good idea that! Never too late? By gum! but it *is* though — too late for marble works! I mun be off. Cum and dine wi' me at Stafford Park. Five o'clock sharp, and —stop a bit! Cum hafe-an-hour earlier, and I'se show thee picturs. Know owt about pictures? I can show thee one or two worth a Jew's eye.

Moind, then, hafe past fower, and we'll fettle it oop after dinner."

At half past four we were at Stafford Park, and Reade, who was also a connoisseur and a good judge too, was delighted with the pictures.

After dinner (a very good one), we "fettled it up," but as usual "Mun-be-Done" got the best of it.

In addition to paying a handsome rental he bound me not to act at the Queen's during the next twelve months, and then he made me take half-a-dozen members of his company whom I didn't want, including, fortunately, two or three whom I did, and so we signed and sealed for a month, commencing 6th April 1865.

The same night we ran over to Liverpool and arranged with my friend Copeland for the Amphitheatre for six weeks to follow, wired Chute and arranged for Bristol. Next morning went to Birmingham and arranged with W. H. Swanboro for a month, and so our first provincial tour was not only settled in twenty-four hours, but carpenters and painters were actually set to work on the scenery.

These matters settled, Reade returned to London, elate and confident of success.

I remained for a few days to superintend matters of detail and to arrange for pictorial posters, which were designed by Benjamin Fountain, a man of genius whom I had discovered in Leeds—a man who devoted to this sectarian town talents which ought to have been given to the world.

Amongst other innovations of which I am by no means proud, I am the culprit who first introduced pictorials in connection with the drama.

The first poster of this kind ever devised for the English stage was designed by Fountain, for me, to illustrate the supreme moment in Schiller's tragedy, "The Robbers"—made memorable by Coleridge's high-falutin' sonnet:

> "Schiller, that hour I would have wished to die,
> When through the woods a famished father's cry," etc.

There can be no doubt that Fountain's pictorials

which I designed contributed greatly to the success which ultimately attended "It is Never too Late to Mend" in town and country.

When I had completed my preparations for the Manchester production I started on my annual holiday.

Passing through London with my wife *en route* for Paris the following Saturday, to our astonishment and delight we found Reade awaiting us at King's Cross.

"You are not going to Paris to-night," he said; "you're coming to Albert Gate. Dinner and your room will be ready by the time we get there. After dinner you're going with us to the Princess's to see one of the most delightful plays in existence."

He was right. "Arrah na Pogue" is one of the most delightful and certainly was one of the most admirably-acted plays the stage has ever seen.

What a cast—what exquisite scenery—what delightful music—and, I repeat, what a delightful play!

There was Arrah of the kiss, with "eyes of Irish grey" and the voice of gold; there was charming bright-eyed Patty Oliver as Fanny Power; there was John Brougham, the most genial of O'Grady's, the noblest type of the Irish gentleman in the world; there was Harry Vandenhoff, then in the flower of manly beauty, as the McCoul; there was Dominic Murray in Feeny (an inimitable performance); there were half-a-dozen *raal* Kerry boys imported from the Theatre Royal, Dublin, for the minor characters; and there was Dion himself—comedian, tragedian, poet, author, manager, stage-manager; and there was I, laughing like a boy, crying like a girl, amused, enthralled, enchanted at one and the same moment.

It saddens me to think that all these admirable artists (except sweet Arrah herself, whom I saw the other day, gracious and charming as ever) and the three dear friends who shared my pleasure on that auspicious night have "slipped like shadows into shade," and I alone remain to recount that delightful experience!

. . . . . .

Next night found me at the old Opera House in the Rue Le Pelletier "assisting" at the *première* of Ambroise Thomas' opera of "Hamlet," with Faure, admirable actor as well as great singer, as Hamlet, and Christine Nillson as Ophelia. The opera is—but "that is another story!"

My brief holiday over, I returned to work, and commenced rehearsals at once.

My new recruits consisted of Miss Caroline Carson from Drury Lane and the Princess's—one of three sisters renowned for their beauty. This lady, who had already distinguished herself highly in one of my companies as the heroines of "Katharine Howard" and "Black-ey'd Susan," and as Margery in "The Rough Diamond," etc., was the Susan Merton, for which a certain pathetic sincerity, combined with her remarkable beauty, especially adapted her; while Mr Henry Loraine, (then an admirable and accomplished actor), stepped into my shoes as Tom Robinson; Mr Henry Sinclair, a good rough actor, for many years at Drury Lane, took my brother's place as George Fielding, while he slipped into Eden; Mr John Pritchard, formerly manager of the York Circuit, made a powerful and portentous Isaac Levi; Mr Fred Everill (afterwards one of the principal members of the Haymarket company) was an excellent Meadows; and the local comedian, one Thompson, "a fellow of infinite jest," was the Crawley, while the minor characters were all acted by men who had been or were tragedians.

Still more remarkable to relate, among the supernumeraries were two gentlemen who ultimately became, and are still, principal tragedians, and who have since played the principal parts in this very play; another, who became stage-manager of a London theatre, and who is now, alas! in a poorhouse; and another, who for years was manager of one of the principal Manchester theatres.

With the exception of Calhaem, Crawley, and Eden, all these good people were six-footers, and

Photo by Copelin & Son, Chicago

EDWARD COLEMAN

THE ORIGINAL GEORGE FIELDING

were not inaptly styled "Coleman's Patagonian Company."

By this time Reade had ceased to interfere with our rehearsals; and the music being arranged and dramatic action already invented, the actors, knowing they had only one stage-manager to deal with, were perfect in the text at the very first rehearsal, docile, attentive, and obliging.

The *mise en scene* was perfect. No more beautiful scenes have ever been presented than George Fielding's farm, and the waterfall at the Golden Horseshoe in Australia.

The production took place on Monday, 6th August 1865.

Strangely enough, two old friends of mine, Miss Amy Sedgwick and Miss Beatrix Shirley, who had formerly been my leading ladies, happened to be in Manchester, and I invited them to our *première*. Both were beauties, in the rich, ripe bloom of woman hood, and finely contrasted with each other, the one being fair as morning, while the other was dark as night.

If there was a fine woman anywhere about, Reade was attracted as irresistibly as a fly is drawn to a honey-pot, so, of course, he came to my box for an introduction.

After the usual civilities we settled down for the play.

When the gorgeous Susan Merton sailed down the stage the two ladies craned up their necks and took stock of their rival. Then Reade took stock of them.

"By the living jingo!" he whispered, "a perfect constellation! Heré, Pallas Athené and Idalian Aphrodité! Were I Paris, hang me if I should know to which of 'em to award the apple!"

The play and the players were received with the utmost enthusiasm, and the audience divided honours equally with the author and the manager.

As we came out we met "Mun-be-Done" in the vestibule.

"Got 'em, lad, got 'em!" he said. "Cry off th' rent, come in on shares, and I'll gi'e thee a hundred pound for thy bargain!"

"No, thanks!" I replied. "It's good enough as it is."

The Manchester Press, usually disposed to be hypercritical and exacerbating, were unanimous in their eulogies, but—an insect can sting an elephant if it gets in his eye—an insect got into Reade's eye, and he was furious.

The local correspondent of the great channel of communication with the managers—the *Era*—merely mentioned the fact of our production, and then proceeded to state in terms of condescending commendation that a former version of the story (by one of the thieves!) had been acted at the Queen's Theatre for eighty-nine consecutive nights, and was only withdrawn then in consequence of the imminent production of the pantomime.

Although he inserted this insolent avowal of piracy and petty larceny, the editor took the opportunity of reminding his readers that the *Era* had already inserted a special notice on the original production of the play at Leeds, and that his correspondent, having an entire week for the purpose, ought to have sent a proper notice of the Manchester production.

The weather was abnormally hot, but the theatre was crowded to overflowing till we moved on to Liverpool, where we had to fight with Fechter, Kate Bateman, and Mapleson's Italian Opera at the Theatre Royal.

Fechter, who arrived a week before his engagement, came night after night, and paid us the great compliment to pronounce our play the best acted, the best mounted, and the best stage-managed play he had seen in this country!

Referring to the stage management he was kind enough to say: "If the team is like this, what must

the teamster be? I speak of what I know, because I flatter myself I *am* a stage-manager. Come to the Lyceum, my boy; come and act with me. I can show you a thing or two, and you can show me something, and I'm glad to live and learn."

Poor Fechter! had he only learnt to know himhimself! His genius was of the highest order: had he only known how to control it!

My sweet friend Kate Bateman was then at her zenith, and was an enormous favourite in Liverpool, where she attracted overflowing houses.

By-the-by, at this period, it was essential for young actors to learn their rudiments, and my friends were wont to send their girls and boys to acquire a knowledge of their business in the "School," as the York Circuit was then called. They didn't pay for being taught; *au contraire*, I paid them for the privilege of teaching them. Every girl or boy received her or his rural guinea a week, and learnt to live on it too!

At or about this very time, the two Addison girls, and Clara Dillon, Augustus Harris, Fred Buckstone, Sidney Lacy, Charles Pitt, and Richmond Bateman (the poor boy who was soon afterwards drowned on his way out to join the American Legation in Japan), were members of my company.

At the "Colonel's" request I brought Richmond to Liverpool, where he played William Fielding, and played it admirably.

Besides the fair "Leah" and her company, we had not only to encounter Fechter and the Lyceum troupe, but Mapleson with Tietjens, Wachtel, Santley, and a numerous and efficient Italian opera company. The attraction, however, of "Never too Late" continued without abatement for six consecutive weeks, when we migrated to Bristol, Bath, and Birmingham, where the Inferno of the Model prison existed.

The officer who had charge of the gallery of our theatre there assured me that half the gallery audience of the opening night had, at one period or other, been under the iron hand of Hawes and Co.

Anyhow, our gods were most sympathetic deities!

Mr Loraine had been a great local favourite of former years, and his popularity added point to every utterance. He and my brother (Eden) were the heroes of the hour—every line they uttered evoked plaudits loud and long-continued, while Hawes and his myrmidons were assailed with howls of execration.

Could the angry gods have got at them they would scarcely have escaped condign punishment there and then.

Referring to this remarkable demonstration on the part of the audience a Birmingham publicist stated at the time:

"If anyone should doubt the abhorrence of Birmingham to such horrible inhumanities, let him witness the performance of the drama. He will then know, by the uncontrollable sobs of the audience at the simulated sufferings of the victims, and by the murmurs of execration with which the representative of the diabolical governor is greeted, how utterly Birmingham despises wrong-doing and tyranny, and how entirely its people compassionate the victims of cruelty and oppression."

Much was written in Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, and Birmingham on the production. Out of all the reams of criticism I only inflict this one, from the *Daily Post*, upon the reader:

"Painful as the incidents delineated with so much force, skill, pathos, and dramatic power are, they are by no means equal to the stern facts upon which the dramatist has based his tragic scenes. The dismal history was inscribed in our local record, and is probably well-nigh forgotten by those who were living at that time. . . .

"On the 29th October 1849 the gaol (of Birmingham) was opened, Captain Mackonochie being appointed governor. He had been superintendent at Norfolk Island, and introduced the 'mark system,'

under which a prisoner was not *entitled* to any other food than bread and water, but might *earn* an improved dietary, together with other indulgences and rewards, in proportion to the number of marks he should obtain. This system the captain desired to introduce into Birmingham gaol.

"This beneficial system was not allowed to continue in operation for any length of time. In March 1850 the office of principal warder became vacant, and Lieutenant Austin was appointed. From the day he entered he seems to have aimed at undermining the authority of the governor. Quarrels arose, and Austin jesuitically sent in his resignation, but it was not accepted. Shortly after, Captain Mackonochie was deprived of his appointment; and on 21st October 1851 Austin was appointed governor. The humane system and the generally mild treatment to which prisoners had been subjected were immediately superseded by others of brutality and cruelty. Between November 1851 and April 1853 there were no less than twelve attempts at suicide, and three in which the unfortunate prisoners actually succeeded in destroying their lives. The Blue-book is full of harrowing details such as make one shudder. Many cases might be cited, but I shall be able only to find room for one. This is that of the boy Andrews, who serves as the model of 'Josephs,' the main difference being that Andrews was driven to suicide, while in the drama the boy Josephs dies in the arms of the chaplain. For stealing four pounds of beef Edward Andrews (a boy of fifteen years of age) was committed, 28th March 1853, for three months. The chaplain described him as 'quiet, mild, docile'; but the governor said he was of a 'sullen and dogged disposition.' On 30th March he was put to work at the crank. One of the witnesses deposed that 'to accomplish the 10,000 revolutions necessary for a day's work a boy would exert force equal to one-fourth of an ordinary draught-horse.' He failed to perform his task on the 30th and 31st. *On both these days he was fed on bread and water only, not*

receiving any food whatever until night! On 17th April he was put into the punishment jacket, where the arms were crossed on the breast and tied together, motion being impossible. In addition to the jacket a stiff leather stock was fastened tightly round his neck, and he was strapped in a standing position to the walls of his cell. On the 19th he was again strapped for four hours. On that occasion, the chaplain was attracted to his cell by shrieks of 'murder.' On going there, he found the wretched lad suffering great bodily pain in his arms, chest, and neck, crying and wailing most piteously. The chaplain found that the stock was fastened so tightly that he could not insert his finger between it and the poor boy's neck. On the 22nd and 24th he was again strapped. On this occasion a bucket of water was thrown over him, and he was seen standing with one sock and one bare foot on the wet stone floor of his cell. On 26th and 27th April he was deprived of his bed from 5.30 A.M. to 10 P.M. On the evening of the latter day, as the watch was taking the bed to the cell, he found the hapless lad hanging dead."

The murderous ruffian, who had driven the poor lad to this extremity, was tried at Warwick, indicted, convicted, and—horrible travesty of justice! —sentenced to three months' imprisonment!

Things are bad enough now, when a gentleman of the Hooligan fraternity murders a poor wounded soldier, a total stranger, in the open street, murders him in sheer wantonness, for the mere pleasure of assassination, and escapes with seven years' penal servitude, but not quite so bad as they were at Warwick Assizes in the year of grace 1851.

Our tour, which terminated at Birmingham, was marked by a mishap which made me the victim of misplaced confidence.

Immediately preceding our engagement, was that of Sothern, who was opposed at the Theatre Royal

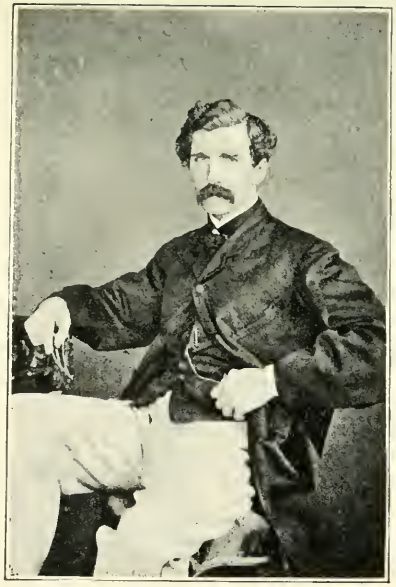

Photo by H. Henry]

EDWARD SOTHERN

Photo by W. & D. Downey, Newcastle]

KATE BATEMAN

by Miss Kate Bateman. Birmingham was a stronghold of the fair Katie. The Warwickshire lads had the "Leah" fever! So strong, indeed, was the vogue that the gallery was closed and the overflow of the pit was flooded up into the gallery at pit prices.

Sothern opened to a very bad house at the Prince of Wales. The piece (a new one) went wretchedly to the scanty audience and Master Ned resolved, at whatever cost, to get out of it.

The convenient excuse of Influenza was found, and the theatre had to be closed. The position was a serious one for the manager, who had gone to considerable expense in the preparation of scenery, etc.

The Birmingham public were very exacting, and the closure, being in every one's mouth, threatened to ruin the theatre.

The hapless manager made his way to the Hen and Chickens, where Sothern was staying, penetrated to my Lord Dundreary's room, and found his lordship the life and soul of a jovial party of friends to whom he was explaining the mystery of the Davenport brothers' Tom Fool knot.

Swanboro begged Sothern to fulfil his engagement, but he remained obdurate, and left Birmingham next morning.

This contretemps would have been absolutely fatal to Swanboro had not the success of "Never too Late to Mend" partially retrieved it. It was anticipated, however, that the Pantomime would retrieve everything.

This sort of rubbish cannot be produced without money. It was now November, and Swanboro appealed to me to help him over the stile. "A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind." Being a manager myself I advanced him £500 out of my receipts on the security of his acceptance due the first month of the Pantomime.

Up to this time the Birmingham Christmas piece had been highly successful. Pantomime is All Fools' holiday, and all fools rush to do honour to their patron saint.

On this occasion there was a terrible snowstorm, which lasted for a considerable period. The streets were impassable, and even the fools were not altogether lunatics, and they stayed at home!

The Pantomime was a dismal failure, and the bill came back.

Swanboro, however, had commenced proceedings, against Sothern, and had good grounds for action, inasmuch as my facetious friend, who was engaged to him for a fortnight, and who had alleged indisposition for inability to act, had actually acted in Dublin during what ought to have been his second week in Birmingham!

The action came on. 'Tis an awkward subject even to hint at, but the fact remains (let it be said to the honour of the English bar that it is one of unusual occurrence!) Swanboro was sold by his counsel, lost his case, and I lost my money, and on this calamity our first provincial tour ended, while London still remained obstinately closed to us.

Photo by Wolke & Sons]

THE ONE AND ONLY JACKY

STANISLAUS CALHAEM

Photo by Moyall, London]

GEORGE VINING AS TOM ROBINSON

GEORGE VINING IN "LE MALAIDE IMAGINAIRE"

CHAPTER III

TRANSFERRED TO TOWN

George Vining, Manager of the Princess's, comes down to York to see "Never too Late"—Is strongly impressed, and resolves to transfer it to Town—Over the Walnuts and the Wine—A Romance in a Nutshell—Production of the Play at the Princess's—A Row and a Riot—Tomlins and Co. on the Rampage—The "Tune the old Cow died from"—The *Era* Version of the Row—Arthur Reade *loquitur*—Author's Letter *re* Tomlins to Editor of the *Reader*—Posthumous Paper, "Reade's Luck," written eighteen years later—Despite the Cabal "Never too Late" acted 140 nights—£8000 cleared by the Production

George Vining, then manager of the Princess's, had been approached by Mrs Seymour on the subject of "Never too Late." He read it, but was not impressed with it.

"Perhaps," said he, "it may act better than it reads. Could I have only seen it, I daresay I might be better qualified to form an opinion."

Thereupon Reade immediately wrote me to York (where I was located), begging me to put up the play for a week, so that Vining might run down and see it.

It was in vain that I pointed out the difficulties —*i.e.* the absence of appropriate scenery, the labour of rehearsals for so short a run, the certainty of loss ('twas in the dog days!); he was as importunate and as unreasonable as a woman—would take no denial, and wrote me:

"D—n the scenery! You only need the prison set; you can do that in a week and vamp the rest. You have all the old cast, and if you'll only give Hamlet and Othello and Charles Surface a rest,

and deign to do your original part, as you *can* do it if you like, they'll never miss the scenery. Think how often I've been disappointed, and don't wreck me now that I am in sight of port!"

Thus adjured I yielded a reluctant consent, stipulating, however, that Vining must not be present until the third or fourth performance.

To my surprise and annoyance Master George turned up the very first night, just as the curtain was about to rise. The house, though not crowded, was comfortably full.

We commenced to the moment, and there were no delays between the acts. Terribly in earnest, and thoroughly familiar with the piece, we took it at a gallop, and it went like wildfire. Vining said we hypnotised him. However that might be, he resolved, there and then, to produce the play at the end of the run of "Arrah na Pogue," and I wired Reade to that effect that very night.

Vining was kind enough to offer me my original part, but I replied: "No, dear boy, after waiting all these years, I am not going to *débuter* in town in a convict's dress and a scratch wig. Do it yourself!"

He rejoined he had no more desire than I had to figure in the livery of the broad arrow. "Besides," he continued, "there is that blessed 'cuss' at the end of the second act, which requires more guns than I can carry."

"Cut it out!" said I.

"I will! If I do the part!" he rejoined.

(He *did* do it, and he *did* cut out the "cuss," which was always my great effect.

"But you'll let me have Jacky—I can't do without him."

"Certainly."

"And Josephs?"

"Impossible."

"Anyhow, you'll lend me Hawes?"

"Not the slightest objection if he hasn't; but nothing less than Peter Teazle or Polonius will suit

him in town! But supper's waiting, and I'm hungry as a hunter, so come along."

We had not met since George had plunged into management, and he was now bursting to record his remarkable experiences.

Since Shakespeare held horses at the door of the Globe, and Alleyne left "God's Gift" to the actors (which, by the way, the actors haven't got!) all London managements have had their elements of romance—but none more romantic than Vining's.

At the end of Alfred Wigan's tenure of the Olympic, he (Vining) had migrated first to Fechter at the Lyceum, next to the St James's, where he became leading man and stage-manager for Miss Herbert, that superb creature, whose name conjures up old memories of the Strand and Olympic, and two never-to-be-forgotten images, the wicked Lady Audley of my friend Miss Braddon's famous story, and chaste Dian's descent upon the crescent of the moon to her beloved Endymion, in William Brough's charming burlesque.

Vining's tenure of office at the St James's was shortened by an untoward incident.

Horace Wigan had adapted Sardou's "Nos Intimes" under the title of "Friends or Foes." The work was somewhat crudely done, and during the rehearsals the blue pencil had been applied so ruthlessly that a row ensued, during which Wigan was ignominiously ejected and forbidden the theatre.

Direful vows of vengeance were emitted on both sides. Wigan vowed to have Vining's gore, whilst Vining retorted by avowing his intent to wipe his boots on Wigan's corpse.

Both confided their wrongs to Boucicault, who confided them to me.

"Dion," quoth Horace, "I'm going to-night to see the play again. If the bald-headed brute dares take out another line I'll thrash him within an inch of his life! I'm a pupil of Tom Sayers, and if I let the sweep have a smell—just *one* smell—of 'the auctioneer' he's dead as a red herring!"

Bent on mischief, Boucy went round to warn Vining.

"Bosh!" retorted George. "Everybody knows I'm an athlete. I don't want to take advantage of the little beast, but if he lays a finger on me I'll strangle him like the Python!"

Ensconced in the gallery with a friend, Wigan found his poor play blue-pencilled worse than ever. Furious with rage, he leaped downstairs, rushed to the top of the passage which leads to the stage-door of the St James's and mounted guard, awaiting the arrival of his enemy. When at length he emerged, accompanied by Boucicault who had stayed to see the fun, both belligerents let out a howl of rage, exclaiming simultaneously: "Hold me tight!—hold me tight!—or murder will be done!"

"In fact," said Boucy, "they reminded me of the disputants over the Walcheren Expedition, when

> 'The Earl of Chatham with his sword drawn,
> Stood waiting for Sir Richard Straughan;'

while

> 'Sir Richard, longing to be at him,
> Stood waiting for the Earl of Chatham!'"

In mutual peril of their lives the opponents summoned and cross-summoned each other for inciting to a breach of the peace.

In due time they appeared at Bow Street.

Both were severely reprimanded by the beak, and jointly and severally bound in their own recognisances. Meanwhile, the piece, proving a failure, was withdrawn.

Vining had to withdraw too. Yet, such is the fickleness of public taste, another version of the play, produced shortly afterwards by Mademoiselle Beatrice, at the Olympic, was a success; while yet a third, "Peril," was one of the greatest successes ever achieved by the Bancrofts during their reign.

Now a certain distinguished solicitor had taken the Princess's to exploit his wife in the great parts.

The public had been inappreciative to the lady, and though Miss Amy Sedgwick, Hermann Vezin, George Belmore, and other popular artistes had been added to the company, there was still "a beggarly account of empty benches."

The management was on the highway to ruin—had nearly reached the end of the journey—when Vining was invited to take the helm in the hope that he might retrieve matters.

He succeeded in keeping things afloat for a few weeks; but the end was not only inevitable, but imminent, for there were tradesmen's bills, printing and posting, arrears of advertisements, arrears of salaries, arrears of rent, rates and taxes, proceedings in the Court of Queen's Bench, proceedings in the County Court, and proceedings in Bankruptcy were actually threatened.

A heap of money had been expended on scenery, costumes, properties, etc. As yet judgment had not been signed, bailiffs were not in, but in forty-eight hours they were due, and then everything would be lost! In the last extremity the hapless manager proposed that Vining should take the "whole bag of tricks" for £500 cash down,—provided it was paid at ten o'clock next morning.

Vining ran down to his cousin, Wilde, who was "Buckey's" treasurer at the Haymarket and proprietor of the Café de l'Europe next door.

"It is the chance of a lifetime," said Wilde. "I haven't got the coin now, but I *will* get it if you will only temporise. Get a week's option — I'll find the money and go in with you!"

Armed with this proposal Vining met the unfortunate manager at the Albion at ten o'clock next morning and offered to provide the money in a week's time.

"Not the slightest use," rejoined Mr L. "I've had a straight tip that judgment will be signed to-morrow, the bailiffs will take possession an hour later, and I shall be left high and dry without a

postage - stamp, perhaps nailed and taken to the Fleet. Besides, there's £500 due at to - morrow's treasury, and I haven't £5 to meet it.

"No; my boy! There's only one way out. I must make a bolt of it. Give me £50 and I'll clear out and hand over to you every stick and stone I have in the blasted place!"

Fortunately Vining had this amount, and a little more, in the bank. "Wait here," said he, "and I'll bring you the money."

"No, no; not here! Come to Harry Vyfers' office, in Chancery Lane. He shall prepare a contract to make you safe!"

In a quarter of an hour Vining met the two lawyers, handed over £50, received his agreement duly signed and attested, and an inventory of his property.

"Harry," said the manager, "you'll see my friend through. Good-bye! I'm off."

With that fifty pounds he baffled the bailiffs, bolted to Boulogne, and settled with his creditors at his convenience.

When the venturous Vining had taken stock of his purchase and locked up the theatre he made tracks for the Adelphi. On his way there he encountered Boucicault, whom he took into his confidence.

"Off you go!" said Boucy. "See Webster before he gets wind through another channel. Howld on—howld on, my boy, and get in on *any* terms! I've a piece ready — a great part in it— made for you. Can be done in a fortnight, and will make your fortune! Off with you, and don't leave owld Ben till you've got the theatre."

"When," continued Vining, "I told Webster what had happened, and handed him the keys, he was utterly flabbergasted; but when I said I had a piece ready by Boucicault, could be done in a fortnight, cordially as he detested Dion, the dear old chap jumped at the idea, returned me the keys, told me to go ahead and the lease should

be prepared right off the reel—and I left his office manager of the Princess's!"

"To be sure, I'd little or no money, but I had a good name and a clean slate, and credit was thrust upon me in every direction.

New brooms sweep clean!

Boucicault was as good as his word, and in a fortnight the theatre opened with an old friend with a new face, "Les Pauvres de Paris," transformed into "The Poor of London," in which a realistic fire scene was introduced. Badger fitted me like my skin, and I "struck ile" with my very first venture!"

Apropos of "Les Pauvres de Paris," Reade bought the English rights from Auguste Macquet, and adapted it himself under the title of "Poverty and Pride," but his version (still in existence) has never been acted to this day.

I am under the impression, however, that Reade utilised some of the incidents in "Hard Cash."

This, however, I know for a certainty — that some years previously a version of the piece was done, by his permission, for Shepherd and Creswick, at the Surrey by Stirling Coyne, under the title of "Fraud and its Victims,"—indeed, I saw it the first night. Shepherd (the very worst minor-theatre actor that ever trod the stage!) was the Badger; Creswick, a sound, sensible, admirable actor, was the interesting hero, in which he created an effect he scarcely anticipated.

When the dear old chap turned up in Seven Dials, attired as the redoubtable Jeremy Diddler, imploring the benevolent costers to buy a box of matches from a poor youth, a roar arose which might have been heard in the New Cut, and a shower of coppers descended from Olympus, amidst which the tragedian bolted, and the curtain fell somewhat prematurely. That effect was never repeated.

Prior to this an infringement of Reade's rights occurred under some bogus management at the

Strand, and he inhibited it, in consequence of which the management commenced an action against him for libel, lost it, and let him in for a heavy bill of costs in defending it — whereupon he "went" for manager and author, and landed one or both in Guildford Jail.

And now, after all this time, Boucy (who had already done the piece in the States under the title of "The Poor of New York") was coining money with it in Oxford Street. Hard lines these for Reade! But out of evil came good, as it led to friendly relations and collaboration with the most successful dramatist of the day.

Vining's next card was another new version of a yet older acquaintance — "The Bohemians of Paris" — transmogrified by the deft Dion into "After Dark;" with another sensation—the most remarkable yet attempted—an audacious crib of the railway effect from Augustin Daly's blood-curdler "Under the Gaslight," which had been the sensation of New York the previous season, and now became the rage of London.

After this came "Arrah na Pogue," which crowded the theatre nightly, and continued to do so till 30th September 1865, when it was withdrawn to make room for "It is Never too Late to Mend."

It will be remembered that on the original production considerable friction arose between Reade and myself because I declined to permit certain realistic effects.

When the play was produced on the 4th October, it was done with all my original business, music *mise-en-scene*, etc., but unfortunately for himself the author was permitted to have his own way with reference to the revolting incidents which I had suppressed.

Being advised of this circumstance, I decided on being conspicuous by my absence on the first night.

The result was precisely what I had anticipated,

and the *Era* (which for months had chronicled the success of the play in the country) thus recorded its reception in town:

'A storm of indignation broke forth during the last scene of the second act, which, after some ominous premonitory mutterings, threatened to bring the piece to a premature termination.

Voices were heard from the stalls, loudly protesting against the representation as revolting, and one of the dissentients whose excitement was stronger than his discretion, made himself so conspicuous that he was readily recognised as a well-known dramatic critic, who might perhaps more judiciously have reserved his comments for the morning paper he represented.

The clamour thus raised caused Mr Vining for a time to drop the character of Tom Robinson and to address the audience as follows:

'Ladies and gentlemen, with due submission to public opinion, permit me to call your attention to one fact which appears to have been overlooked.

It has been acknowledged that the book from which this play is taken has done a great deal of good.

We are not here representing a system, but the abuse of a system, and I may refer you to the Blue-books'——

'(A voice from the pit here exclaimed: "We want no Blue-books on the stage!")

'—for the truthfulness of these things. This question can be discussed elsewhere, and I believe I am not wrong in supposing that most of the dissentients have——' (pausing significantly) '*not come in free!*'

'After this the performance was resumed, but when the boy Josephs (Miss Louisa Moore) was on the point of committing suicide by hanging, an indescribable thrill of horror ran through the whole of the spectators, and several ladies rose and left the house.'

When I saw the papers next day I telegraphed Reade: 'Cut—cut—cut!' and he replied: 'I have cut. Come and see!'

The objectionable interpolations, were omitted on the second performance, and despite, perhaps in consequence of, the ordeal through which it had passed (since the scandalous scene of the first night proved a sensational advertisement) the play proved ultimately a gigantic success.

Reade, who took exception to certain features of the performance, notably to the rendering of the music, vented his wrath in the following verses suggested by the manner in which the orchestra performed the famous melody, 'See the Rosy Morn appearing,' in the third act.

See—the old—Cow—is—a dying
And—the dismal—crows—are flying
North—and South—and West—and East
All—to feed—on one—poor beast!

Kiddies—mourn—your—empty—cups,
Kittens—meow—howl—oh ye pups,
Blood—from flint—did—never—flow
Nor mil—ky stream—from—a—dead cow.
See—the old—Cow is—, etc.

The author's nephew, my friend Arthur Reade (superintendent of Charing Cross Hospital), who was an eye-witness of the scene, has been kind enough to send me his impressions of the first night, and here they are:

When 'Never too Late to Mend' was about to be produced in London, in wishing Uncle Charles success, I said: 'I hope it will run one hundred and fifty nights!' He replied: 'If it does, my boy, I will give you a five-pound note.' It ran, I think, one hundred and sixty-five nights, and, of course, I had my 'fiver.'

I was there the first night, and can recall the extraordinary murmur that ran through the house

when the curtain rose on the prison scene and discovered the tread-mill at work, and I shall never forget the tremendous row at the end of the prison scene, when Josephs dies in the arms of Tom Robinson. The excitement culminated at the end of the act. Though the author's foes were few, they were noisy and persistent. His friends, however, would not allow them to have it all their own way. One excited old gentleman got up in the stalls (I believe Mr Tomlins, the dramatic critic attached to the *Morning Advertiser*) and shouted himself hoarse with his protests, until advised to go out by an Oxford youth who was sitting with my brother and my cousin Winwood Reade, then just home from Africa. Finally, George Vining, who played "Tom Robinson," came forward and made an appeal for order, informing the malcontents that if they would leave the theatre, their money would be returned at the pay place. The baffled Tomlins left or was ejected, protesting against 'brutal realism,' and the play proceeded. From my seat in the dress-circle I could see the author. He never moved a muscle or stirred in his chair, nor paid any heed to the lady by his side, who seemed greatly agitated.

When the curtain fell he was loudly called for, and at last came forward in his box and made a stately bow.

I saw the last night as well as the first of this play. Indeed on the last night uncle took me round behind the scenes, my first experience of the world behind the footlights. Tom Robinson was engaged in his pathetic remonstrance with the brutal Hawes, and when he came off, he pushed his convict cap off his head and said to uncle: 'Good evening, Reade,—very hot, isn't it?' At the end of the prison scene the applause was hearty, but not sufficiently prolonged to amount to a 'call.' Josephs was played by Miss Louisa Moore. When the curtain fell upon Josephs' death, up jumps the dead boy and says to Vining: 'The

wretches! 'Tis the first time they haven't given us a call—and the last night, too!'

Miss Adah Isaacs Menken, a beautiful but somewhat eccentric woman, shared a private box on this occasion with John Oxenford, the most eminent dramatic critic of the period, and she assured me that many of the minor fry of journalism were as ostentatiously hostile to the play and the author as Mr Tomlins himself.

That gentleman sought to justify his attitude in an article published over a *nom de plume* in the *Reader*, which elicited the following scathing rejoinder from the author:

To the Editor of the "Reader"

'Sir,—You have published (inadvertently, I hope) two columns of intemperate abuse of my drama, and mendacious personalities aimed at myself.

The author of all this spite is not ashamed to sympathise with the heartless robbers from whom justice and law have rescued my creation and my property.

(*Query.* Was he not set on by those very robbers?)

He even eulogises a ruffian who, on the 4th October, raised a disturbance in the Princess's Theatre, and endeavoured to put down my play by clamour, but was called to order by the respectable portion of the audience.

Have you any sense of justice and fair play where the party assailed is only an author of repute, and the assailant has the advantage of being an obscure scribbler? If so, you will give me a hearing in my defence. I reply in one sentence to two columns of venom and drivel. I just beg to inform honest men and women that your *anonymous contributor*—who sides with piratical thieves against the honest inventor, and disparages Charles Reade, and applauds

one Tomlins—is *Tomlins*.—I am, your obedient servant, CHARLES READE."

Reade was not only a good hater, but he had a most tenacious memory, and actually eighteen years after that memorable night at the Princess's he wrote the following ferocious Philippic on the subject:—

READE'S LUCK

'Autobiography is a vile, egotistical thing. It always must be. But there is a set-off: you learn something real about the man, and that is what you will never learn from anybody else.

Let this, and my 'recent wrongs,' be my excuse for troubling you with one chapter of my public life. I cannot divest such a thing of egotism any more than I can wash the spots out of a leopard; but I promise it shall not be unmixed egotism, but shall lead to general conclusions of public utility.

In that reservoir of delights, the 'Arabian Nights,' nothing is more charming than the story of 'Sinbad the Sailor,' and the art with which it is introduced: a poor, half-starved fellow, misfortune's butt, comes upon a gay company feasting luxuriously; at the head of the table sits a white-headed senior, the host; homage surrounds him; slaves watch his hand; friends hang upon his words; he is a type of ease, luxury, wealth, respectability. The worn and hungry traveller stands apart and glares upon banquet and host, and his heart sinks lower than ever. Contrasting his hard lot with the luxury before him, he murmurs at the inequality of things and the injustice of fortune.

The next moment he would gladly recall his words, for a servant comes and tells him the master of the feast would speak to him; he goes trembling, and expecting bastinado.

'Sit down by me,' says the host, and orders his plate to be heaped.

When he has eaten his fill the venerable senior says quietly: 'I will tell you the story of my life.'

Then the lucky man tells the unlucky one such a tale of adventures, perils, wounds, hardships, sufferings, and despairs, as makes the unlucky man think light of his own griefs. Through all these dangers and horrors had Sinbad the persevering passed, ere he got to be Sinbad the seeming lucky.

Now writers are not Sinbads, nor lead adventurous lives; yet at the bottom of things, dissimilar on the surface, lies often a point of similitude. And so when I read, or hear people talk of one Charles Reade's universal success, of his flashy but popular style, of his ease and affluence, I wear a sickly smile, and think sometimes of 'Sinbad the Sailor,' not lucky, but very unlucky and persevering—for, by heaven, it has never been smooth sailing with me!

In the year 1835 I began to make notes with a view to writing fiction, but, fixing my mind on its masterpieces in all languages and all recorded times, I thought so highly of that great and difficult art that for fourteen years I never ventured to offer my crude sketches to the public.

I began at last, and wrote several dramas, *not one of which any manager would read;* but theatrical England at this time was a mere province of France. Observing which, I crept into the theatre at last with a translation from the French.

From that I went to better things, and wrote several plays alone, and in conjunction with my friend Mr Tom Taylor; but though my talent, whatever it may be, is rather for the drama than the novel, I was, after a hard fight, literally driven into the novel by bad laws and corrupt practices.

Bad laws.—The international copyright law of 1852 was intended to give a French dramatist the sole right to translate and act his play in England for five years, and so encourage home invention by

restraining the former theft. But while the act was being drawn, an English play-wright or two, who had all their lives stolen French ideas, and held it a point of honour to die as they had lived, crawled up the back stairs of the House of Commons, and earwigged the late Lord Palmerston. He, good man, meant no worse, and saw no deeper, than this: 'Let us make the best shopkeeper's bargain we can for England.' But the result was that the English Sovereign, the English Peers, and the English Commons, took their instructions from a handful of impenitent thieves, and disgraced themselves and the nation. They treacherously conveyed into this otherwise noble statute a perfidious clause, allowing 'fair adaptations and imitations' of every foreign drama to be played in England, in defiance of the foreign inventor.

This viper in the basket made the protecting clauses waste-paper and perpetuated dramatic piracy from foreigners in its old, convenient, and habitual form of colourable piracy.

After this, don't laugh at the words *Perfide Albion*, for these words are true, by God!

Well, this wicked and perfidious law enabled a portion of the anonymous press to monopolise the theatres, or nearly. No fool can invent a single good drama, but any fool can adapt two hundred good dramas from the French; and any fool can write—just as any fool could spit—the cant and twaddle, and impudence and ignorance, that some folk adorn by the acre with the blasphemous title of "dramatic criticism."

So when newspapers increased in number and size there arose a *camaraderie*, or compact band of play-wright critics: writers, calamitous to the drama and fatal, above all, to the dramatic inventor. This gang worked in concert as they work to this day. They toadied actors, however wretched. They praised every piece which was written by one of their gang. They flew like hornets at every outsider who did not square them with champagne suppers or other

douceurs, pecuniary bribes included; and then, as now, they sometimes levied blackmail on a manager by a dodge I shall expose by-and-by.

The managers of theatres—most of them actors and extremely sensitive to public praise or censure—truckled to these small fry invested with large powers by reckless journals, and would rather take a French piece, sure to be praised by this little trades' union, than an English piece, sure to be censured by them.

I struggled against this double shuffle for about four years, and then I gave it up in despair, and took to novel-writing—against the grain—and left the stage for years.

During my period of enforced exile from the stage I suffered intellectual hell. I used to go to the theatres and see that one piece of unnatural trash after another could get a hearing yet the market was hermetically sealed to me. It is usual under these circumstances for the disappointed man to turn anonymous writer, call himself a critic or judge, and, in that sacred character, revenge himself on the successful. Unfortunately, my principles and my reverence for that great, holy, incorruptible science, criticism, did not permit me this Christian solace. So I suffered in silence, and with a fortitude which the writers, who babble about my irritability, have shown they cannot imitate in a far milder case.

In 1865 I tried the London stage again under other circumstances, to explain which I must go back a little.

At Christmas 1852 Drury Lane was in the hands of a gentleman with great courage and small capital. He invested his all in the pantomime; and the pantomime failed so utterly that after one week they took it off, and pitchforked on to the stage a drama called "Gold," which I had flung together in the same hasty way. This drama, though loosely constructed, was English, and hit the time. Not being stolen from the French by any member of the trades' union of play-wright critics it was much

dispraised in the papers, and crowded the theatre, and saved the manager.

Afterwards, when the play-wright critics drove me out of the theatre, I was obliged to run cunning, and turned many of my suppressed plays into stories. I dealt so with 'Gold.' I added a new vein of incidents taken from prison life, and so turned the drama 'Gold' into the novel, 'It is Never too Late to Mend."

But lo! the novel being written by a dramatist, naturally presented fresh dramatic features, and tempted me to reconstruct a more effective drama. I offered it to many managers. They declined, and gave their reasons—if I may venture to apply that term to the logic of gorillas.

Presently piratical scribblers got hold of the subject, and gorilla logic melted away directly in the sunshine of theft. Managers, both in town and country, were ready to treat for the rejected subject the moment it was offered them, not by the inventor and the writer, but by scribblers and pirates. Several piratical versions were played, in town and country, with a success unparalleled in those days. Saloons rose into theatres by my brains, stolen; managers made at least seventy thousand pounds out of my brains, stolen; but not one would pay the inventor a shilling nor give his piece a hearing!

At last this impatient Charles Reade, like his predecessor in patience, Job, lost patience, and went to law with the thieves and the dealers in stolen goods.

It was a long and hard fight that would have worn out a poet or two; but after three suits in the Common Pleas, and three injunctions in equity, I crushed the thieves, and recovered my property.

Then I tried the London managers of the day again. I said: 'My amiable, though too larcenous friends, here is an approved subject which you can no longer steal; but that is your misfortune, not your fault: why not make the best of a bad job,

and put a few thousand pounds into your pockets by dealing with the inventor?'

No; not one would deal with a writer for his own brains.

Hares run through the woods in tracks; men run through life in grooves; and these had a fixed habit of dealing with scribblers and thieves for the inventor's brains, and they could not get out of that groove at any price.

Seven mortal years did I offer my now popular drama, 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' to these bigots in vain.

Seven mortal years did I see false, un-English, inhuman trash played at the very theatres which refused me a hearing.

At length I found a manager with a man's head on his shoulders and a man's heart in his body, who produced my play in the country, where it achieved an immediate and pronounced success; whereupon London (which had previously ignored its existence and mine) followed suit, and it was brought out at the Princess's on the 4th of October 1865.

The play-wright critics were there in full force, and several of them sat together in the stalls as usual. One would have thought the circumstances under which the play was played were of a nature to disarm hostility. I had not troubled the theatre for ten years; and even now I was only producing, for my own benefit, a play that had been fully discussed and approved when played for the benefit of misappropriators. One might naturally think it would be hard to find, even amongst the lowest of mankind, a person who did not feel some little compassion for an inventor who had been shouldered off the stage for years by means of his own brains, stolen; and who now asked merely a percentage on his brains, and the same justice which had always been accorded to those brains, when sold for *their own* benefit by dunces and thieves!

But, if you want a grain of humanity, or honour,

or justice, or manly feeling of any kind, don't you go to a trades' union, for you won't find it there. The play-wright critics concerted the destruction of the drama on the first night. They were seen to egg on Mr Tomlins, the critic of the *Morning Advertiser*, to howl down the prison scenes by brute clamour. Tomlins, being drunk, "his custom ever in the afternoon," lent himself to this with inebriate zeal, and got up a disturbance which, with a feeble manager, would infallibly have ended in the curtain being let down and the play withdrawn for ever. But, for once, the clique ran their heads against a man. George Vining defied the cabal from the stage; and at last some fellows in the gallery, shaking off their amazement at the misconduct below, called down, 'Turn the blackguards out!' Now, when the dishonest blackguards in the stalls found the honest blackguards in the gallery had spotted them, they shut up, and prepared their articles for next morning in dead silence.

Of course, they wrote the piece down unanimously. But they had overrated their power. The public got scent of the swindle, rushed to the theatre, and carried the drama triumphantly for 148 nights. The profits were about £8000, of which half came to me on shares. The drama has outlived all the plays that were lauded to the skies that year by the venal clique. It was played in six houses this year, 1873.'

Thirty years have passed since the foregoing lines were written, yet, during the whole of that period, no single year has elapsed in which this once despised play has not been acted in, at least, half of the principal theatres in the United Kingdom!

End of Book the Second

Book the Third

RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS

Extending over an Intimacy of Twenty Years

"Ambrosius loved him . . .
And honoured him, and wrought into his heart
A way by love that waken'd love within,
To answer that which came."

Book the Third

RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS

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THIS PICTURE WAS CHRISTENED BY THE AUTHOR
"THE BENEVOLENT IMBECILE!"

CHAPTER 1

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Exodus from the Haunted House in St George's Road to Naboth's Vineyard — Albert Gate — The Famous Apartment (*see* "A Terrible Temptation"), "Which thus a double Debt contrived to pay: Dining-Room by Night, Studio by Day"— Plays and Players — Novels — Fiddles — Pictures — Another Law-Suit — The Doctor plays the Devil with the Lawyers and wins his Case — The best abused Man in London — A slight Retrospect from 1856 to 1863 — Becomes acquainted with Bulwer Lytton and Charles Dickens—A Dinner at the Star and Garter, and a Reading of a Play — Failure of "Dora" at the Adelphi — Crucifixion of a hapless Scene-Painter — Production and Damnation of "The Double Marriage" at the New Queen's Theatre

In 1868 Reade quitted Bolton Row and took up his abode for a short time in Saint George's Road, in a locality which used to be called Pimlico, but was then budding and has since blossomed into South Belgravia.

The house, which occupies a commanding position at the corner of two streets, looks straight up to the river, including an outlook on four different streets, and is situated within a stone's throw of the very spot where these lines are now being written.

When I turn out for an occasional lonely ramble, or to post my letters in the pillar-box opposite, I am irresistibly attracted to the central window of that house. By day I see bright young faces; by night when the blinds are down, and the light from within makes the jalousy red as blood, strains of music and sounds of joyous voices and happy laughter remind me of the friends of my youth, and recall memories of pleasant times gone, never to return.

The very last time I was in that house ('twas on a Sunday) we dined early for I had to go to the North. It had been a lovely day, and I had a fancy to go down the river as far as the Temple. They all, Reade, Mrs Seymour, Doctor and Mrs Christian (friends from Canada), Mrs Zenda, the Hon. Mrs Delamere, George and Mrs Vining, walked with me to Pimlico Pier, and Vining took it into his head to accompany me to town.

It was near the end of the run of 'Never too Late.' He told me he was bound by his lease to expend £6000 in decorations for the ensuing season, and he had a presentiment of ill-luck.

'I have tried fires, railway trains, sinking bridges, and tread-mills,' said he, 'and don't know what to do next.'

'Try a balloon!' I said.

He did not rise, however, to that aërial suggestion.

Poor George! his premonition turned out unfortunately to be prophetic. His decorations made a sensation, but his opening piece did not!

To atone for ultra-sensationalism he went into the opposite extreme, commenced with a magnificent revival of 'Acis and Galatea,' which proved a colossal failure, — then failure followed after failure.

At this juncture his father, James Vining, who had made some money which he intended to leave George, insisted upon his retirement, lest his modest patrimony should be engulfed in the maëlstrom of management. Like a dutiful son he obeyed.

Observe how history repeats itself.

Vining, after making a fortune by 'The Poor of London,' 'After Dark,' 'Arrah na Pogue,' and 'Never too Late,' lost it all 'in one fell swoop' on his decorations and his attempt to elevate public taste by the production of 'Acis and Galatea.' Similarly, ten or twelve years later, Mr Walter Gooch, who had coined money with a revival of 'Never too Late,' and a production of 'Drink,' lost everything in rebuilding the theatre, and in endeavouring to

exploit Edwin Booth—the distinguished American actor who unfortunately failed to hit the public taste, and whose failure was enhanced by the most prolonged and disastrous snowstorm of the past half-century.

At the last gasp Gooch invited Wilson Barrett to step into the breach. He, too, commenced his campaign by endeavouring to exploit another distinguished American (in petticoats), with the result that at the end of the first three months of his campaign he was saddled with a loss of nearly £12,000!

My good friend Wilson, however, is so thoroughly imbued with the national characteristic, that he never knows when he is beaten. Hence, he held on by the skin of his teeth, changed defeat to victory, and succeeded in ultimately clearing thirty or forty thousand pounds during his tenancy!

Since his retirement the Princess's has passed through every vicissitude of fortune. The latest is, however, not the least remarkable.

At its very lowest ebb—when failure had followed failure—one of my "boys," who had served his apprenticeship with me, actually cleared nearly £6000 in twelve weeks out of a crude, extravagant, ultramontane drama; and probably might have cleared £6000 more, had not the London County Council insisted upon his expending £6000 on certain structural alterations. Whereupon, my astute *protégé*, believing discretion to be the better part of valour, discreetly concluded to suspend the run of the piece in town, and has sent no less than three companies out with it into the country.

The termination of Vining's tenure of the Princess's did not deter him from acting elsewhere, and he played two or three engagements, one with dubious results at the Holborn in the 'Rag Picker of Paris' (one of Lemaitre's great parts); another at the Olympic as Count Fosco in Wilkie Collins' prosaic and long-winded version of his own striking story of 'The Woman in White.'

By-the-by, this work, in the construction of which Collins was assisted by Regnier, the famous 'coach'

of the Français, was the precursor of the numerous inarticulate plays which terminate upon an empty stage and a mere note of interrogation.

The "haunted house" in St George's Road was a little out of the track of ships, so Reade removed to Albert Gate, where he took up his abode in the mid-summer of 1869.

Albert Gate, as all the world knows, is almost the 'hub' of London.

To the front, exactly opposite, stands Sloane Street and Knightsbridge; to the rear, a commanding garden which abuts upon the Park; to the right, Kensington, Kew, Kingston, Richmond, St Margaret's, Twickenham, and Hampton Court; to the left, the Gate itself, Hyde Park Corner and Piccadilly. A cab-stand is within a stone's throw with a shilling fare to the Strand and Covent Garden, and omnibuses (not that Reade ever used one, for he detested them) to all parts, pass to and fro every two minutes.

It occurred to a certain noble lord that a new entrance to the Park from Sloane Street would be a public benefit (and his lordship was right!), but, as the proposed road would cut through Reade's house, he naturally objected, and when the hereditary legislator endeavoured to smuggle a private Bill through Parliament, Reade's indignation knew no bounds. He 'went' for the would-be encroacher in 'Jupiter Junior,' stigmatising him as an up-to-date Ahab, and stuck up a huge signboard inscribed 'Naboth's Vineyard!' outside the threatened house.

He then retained Sir Henry (now Lord Henry) James to oppose the Bill, which (thanks to that eloquent and learned advocate) was ignominiously kicked out.

This pleasant home of delightful memories, though cosy and comfortable, was not spacious; but its owner was fertile in expedients, and he made a new lion's den, big enough for a menagerie, by throwing the passage into the drawing-room, annexing four-and-twenty square feet of garden at the back, forming one large room with French windows opening to the

ground. This palatial apartment served a quintuple purpose. Breakfast in the morning at nine, with the blessed sunshine illumining every nook and cranny; after breakfast, hey presto! 'twas changed to a workship (a 'littery' as well as a literary one!); at one, he, or we, had to clear out while, willy-nilly, the litter was cleared away for a reception-room. The next change took place at night, when it became a dining-room; whilst after dinner, it served for a drawing-room, and a very charming one it made, with its wealth of flowers, of bric-a-brac, of marqueterie, and its profusion of wax-lights. There was never any gas where Reade lived: he couldn't abide the smell, or even the sight of it, in his own house.

Where the walls were not hung with tapestry or lined with looking-glass there were pictures.

If there was one thing about which he prided himself—even more than his plays and his fiddles—it was his pictures. Here is a list of the most remarkable in his collection:

1. "The Graces," by Etty (a masterpiece); 2. "Roland Graeme and Catherine Seyton," by John Faed; 3. "Fire in a Theatre During the Pantomime!" (a clown rushing through the flames with a child in his arms) by Laslett Potts; 4. "Rydal Water," by Carrick (this picture was much praised by Ruskin when it was exhibited); 5. "The Crusader's Return," by Pickersgill; 6. "Andromeda," by Etty; 7. "A Madonna," by Sant; 8. "Portrait of the Chevalier d'Eon," by Reynolds. (This last is now in the possession of General Meredith Read, of New York.)

The gentleman who does, or did, the "Celebrities at Home" in the *World* called upon Reade, saw all these pictures (except "The Graces," which was then at Magdalen), and a dozen others equally valuable, then calmly chronicled his host's want of appreciation for painting as evidenced by the absence of any pictures of note in his house.

From the very commencement of our acquaintance "The Trinity" had been conspicuous by its absence.

Augustus Braham, whom I knew slightly (as

indeed I knew his father and his brothers Hamilton and Warde), had obtained (so I understood) a snug Government appointment—thanks to the influence of the Countess—and had migrated to Portsmouth. Seymour and Curling had moved over to another world, and nothing remained to remind us of their existence except a lawsuit with Curling's executors to recover certain moneys advanced to him by the Duchess or "Egeria" (as I had taken the liberty to christen her), a term of endearment which in the fulness of time got shortened into "Geria."

Money and time and temper were lost, as usual, over these proceedings, and whenever Reade returned from a consultation, he was wont to let off steam, bitterly inveighing against "the law's delay."

'Geria' only laughed and twitted him with his indolence.

'Take it in hand yourself,' quoth she. 'What's the use of being a Doctor of Laws if you can't manage a little 'tuppenny ha'penny' thing like that?'

Taking her at her word he 'went in,' and, with the aid of Sir Henry Mathews, won the case, and returned triumphant with a cheque for the debt and costs.*

'Geria' was a dear, kind creature whose goodness of heart was only equalled by her generosity, although both were held firmly under control by her native shrewdness. Differing in many respects, both she and her partner agreed upon one point—they would fight for farthings on a matter of right; *au contraire*, they would give away pounds when appealed to in the nobler spirit.

At all times they had a number of pensioners absolutely supported by their generosity.

* Writing Mrs Seymour, Reade makes the following amazing statement:—

'In this case I had to dismiss Jessel (afterwards Master of the Rolls) for incapacity (*sic*)! Ballantyne for colloquy with defendant's attorney!! T—— '(his solicitor)' because of his chief clerk's incapacity! and R——'s managing clerk!!! . . . Sir Henry Mathews, then an able junior, won this case, but he never would have done so had it not been for my resolute determination to kick rogues and fools out of the case one after the other.'

Their hospitality was unbounded. No friend ever needed a formal invitation; there was always a knife and fork and a cordial welcome waiting at that hospitable board.

That scandalous scene of the first night at the Princess's had attracted universal attention, and given a fillip to the book as well as to the play, and for a short time the author was the best talked-of and best abused man in London.

Following Boucicault's example, instead of a certainty Reade took a percentage of the receipts, with the result (so he assured me) that he took more money during the first eighteen nights of 'Never too Late' than he had taken for his dramatic work during the preceding eighteen years!

The triumph, so long delayed, but at length achieved, filled him with a fever of delight, and contributed greatly to the intimacy which existed so long between us. For many years he always found a home whenever he pleased in my house, and whenever I came to town I found a home in his.

Now, so please you, gentle reader, though this narrative is intended to be almost exclusively confined to the dramatic work of our author, for the sake of coherence let us take a brief retrospect of his literary achievements during the period which elapsed between the publication of the work which led to our acquaintance and its subsequent production in dramatic form in 1865.

He has himself left it on record, that, though an omnivorous reader and an earnest student, it was fifteen years before he ventured to put pen to paper to write 'a book.'

This can scarcely be taken literally, for though he did not write 'a book' he wrote for the magazines much, studied more, and acquired his intimate acquaintance with the French Theatre, although he frankly admitted that (much as he desired to do so) he never could emancipate himself entirely from the

'fetters' of that which, despite his admiration, he usually designated 'our cumbrous, sprawling, Anglo-Saxon drama.'

He had fondly hoped that the success of 'Never too Late' would have opened all the theatres to him, but, to the end of his life, he alleged that he was perpetually baffled by the caprice and stupidity of the public and the perversity and obtuseness of the managers. Apropos of the latter, barely twelve months before his death he told me that he had made an appointment, only a short time previous, to read a play in a certain fashionable theatre. He was kept waiting for more than an hour, and the manager did not deign to put in an appearance, nor did he even condescend afterwards to explain or apologise for this impertinence. Still more recently, Reade wrote to the management of another fashionable theatre, offering to send a printed copy of a new comedy for approval, and he never even received an answer to his proposal.

It will be remembered that 'Never too Late' was published in 1856, and that, although the play founded upon it was written immediately afterwards, no one would look at it, for seven long years. He did not, however, remain idle all this time.

From 1854 to 1856, he wrote the following magazine articles:—'Cloud and Sunshine,' 'Jack of-all-Trades,' 'The Bloomer,' etc. In 1857 'White Lies,' firstly in dramatic form, adapted from 'Le Chateau Grantier' of Macquet; secondly in narrative (published serially in the *London Journal*); thirdly, recast again into drama.

As already stated he had incurred considerable expense in proving his rights to 'Les Pauvres de Paris.' In his rage at being not only robbed but at being absolutely defrauded of between two or three hundred pounds in costs in proving them, he rushed into print with a furious onslaught on the robbers called 'The Eighth Commandment.' So vitriolic was it that he could get no publisher to be responsible for its publication: hence, determined

not to be baffled, he published it himself at his own expense. Then came another difficulty, an insurmountable one. Mudie's refused to receive it; the reviews regarded it as the rabid outbreak of a man of genius during a temporary aberration of intellect. Hence it fell still-born, and is now regarded as a mere literary curiosity.

In 1858 he wrote 'The Course of True Love never did run Smooth'; and in 1859, 'Love me Little, Love me Long'—each in one volume.

He also wrote and published (at his own expense) in Paris 'Le Faubourg de St Germain,' described on the title-page as a 'Piece en Deux Actes.'

Evidently his knowledge of the French language had improved since his first visit to Paris (see *ante*), for this piece appears to be written in academic and even idiomatic French, but it sprawls terribly, the two acts occupying no less than sixty-three quarto pages! After the archaic fashion of the Greek and Roman drama and many of the French plays, the entrance of each character is denominated as a 'scene.' The curious in such matters may note in the first edition of Bulwer Lytton's comedy of 'Money' the last survival of this absurd tradition of the Antique drama.

The whole of the first act of 'Le Faubourg' takes place in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Lauzac, and is divided into fourteen scenes. In the second act there are two scenes, otherwise tableaux. Tableau I. is an ante-room, divided into eight scenes. Tableau II. is the boudoir of the Duchess de Lauzac, divided into fourteen scenes more!

This delectable composition was sent the round of the Parisian theatres, but, as usual, 'no one looked at it,' or, if they did, the author never heard of it. He tried to induce his friend Macquét to collaborate with a view to production in Paris, but the Frenchman 'didn't see it,' and politely declined.

By-the-by Reade always maintained that this gentleman (a man of distinguished ability and the right hand of the renowned Alexandre Dumas) was

a Scotsman in disguise, and that Macquét was a corruption of Mackay.

The industry and fecundity of our author at this stage of his career is simply astounding, for now there followed, in regular and rapid succession, all the works which constitute the claim of Charles Reade to be remembered as one of the greatest writers of fiction of this century. In this prolific year of 1859, besides the foregoing, he commenced 'A Good Fight' in *Once a Week*, destined by a fortunate lack of appreciation on the part of the editor to ultimately develop into 'The Cloister and the Hearth.'

In November of this same year, through his friend Pearson (the Rector of Knebworth), Reade formed the acquaintance of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.

This was a pleasure long desired and much enjoyed. At this period, in abject imitation of the execrable example of Thackeray, who, in season and out of season, systematically endeavoured to belittle his illustrious compeer (see the crapulous 'Yellowplush Papers'!), the herd of pigmies who crawled about between the legs of both, persistently followed suit in depreciating the eminent abilities they could neither appreciate nor emulate, Reade, however, never hesitated to express his profound belief in the many-sided genius of Edward Bulwer Lytton.

I supplement this memento of their short intimacy by quoting the following letter to his mother, who was also a profound admirer of Lytton's works:—

'KNEBWORTH,
Wednesday, November 1859.

'DEAR MOTHER, — I dined with Sir E. Bulwer yesterday, and passed a pleasant, instructive evening.

We drew from him a review of the great parliamentary leaders and speakers of his day, and some traditions of the last generation of speakers.

He depicted their characters, intellectual and moral, very finely and very fairly. He insists that Palmerston and his contemporaries are vastly inferior to the rising men.

It may interest you to know whom he calls the five great orators of the lower House: Gladstone, Bright, Whiteside, Cairns, D'Israeli (supereminent in irony and personality of every sort, but prolix, and inferior in dealing with great general subjects). I wish you could have heard mine host, for you take more interest in politics than I do.—Yours affectionately, CHARLES.'

'Charles' had always a fine sense of humour, and apparently his admiration for his distinguished friend did not blind him to his foibles, for in a communication of the same date to Mrs Seymour he states:

'He (Lytton) is comic beyond the power of pen to describe. Goes off mentally into the House of Commons and harangues by the yard, with an arm stretched out straight as a line. Puts on an artificial manner—yaw! yaw! yaw! and every moment exposes the artifice by exploding in a laugh which is nature itself—loud, sudden, clear, fresh, naïve, and catching as a ploughboy's.

These periodical returns to nature in her rudest form, from a manner which is the height of transparent artifice, are funny beyond anything the stage has hitherto given us.'

The visit to Knebworth brought Reade in contact with a yet more desirable acquaintance, as the following letter shows:—

'MY DEAR DICKENS,—Herewith let me present to you Mr Charles Reade, whose works and pen are too well known to you to need lengthened introduction. He would like to talk to you on a favourite subject of his for improving the interest of authors. —Yours ever, E. B. LYTTON.

'KNEBWORTH,
November 25th, 1859.'

This introduction led to a prolonged and friendly intimacy between the two Charles's, and in 1861 Charles I. commissioned Charles II. to write 'Hard Cash,' ensuring him £800 for serial rights in *Household Words*.

This work (absolutely one of his best)—assailing the infamies, the cruelties, and the horrors of the madhouse system—strange to say, proved a sad disappointment both to the author and the editor, who alleged that it had actually diminished the circulation of *Household Words*, to the extent of 3000 copies weekly, hence the story had to be brought to a premature conclusion to synchronise with the end of a volume.

This brief, but I fear somewhat imperfect, record of 1856 to 1863 brings us up to the time when I am enabled to speak from personal knowledge of subsequent events.

Reade had now acquired both fame and fortune. Yet, amidst his continually increasing success as a novelist, he perpetually hungered for the glamour of the footlights, the applause of the audience: and he was never happy out of the theatre.

One of his especial weaknesses was a play he had founded upon Tennyson's poem of 'Dora.' I remember as though it were yesterday that, upwards of thirty years ago, he (Reade) took Egeria, Mr Howse of the *New York Tribune*, and myself down to Richmond, to dinner at the Star and Garter, previous to which, he read us this play, and very delighted we were. As we drove back in the cool of the evening, he proposed that I should play Farmer Allan, the 'stern parent.' At that time I had got the poetic drama on the brain, and I replied, with more candour than consideration, that 'as yet I had not arrived at the 'King Lears,' and that when I did go into that line of business, I'd rather go to the original than to an agricultural specimen of the article.' He growled out his favourite platitude about 'the insensate egoism of the actor' and became as surly as a bear with a sore head.

By the way, this reading recalls an incident which occurred during one of his visits to Leeds.

Sir James Kitson, the great ironmaster, while showing us over his works, related the story of a recent strike in which the ringleader justified his conduct by continually saying to Sir James: 'I'm a man, not a mouse!'

Reade immediately annexed the phrase. In scene I. of 'Dora' Farmer Allan says: 'After all, I am a man, and not a mouse.' In Act II. Dora rings the changes on the phrase—*e.g.* 'As for me, I am *not* a man, you know; I am a *mouse*—a poor little *mouse* that lives in a lion's den!'—and later, 'You see, sir, I am not *quite* a mouse!'

When I ventured to remind Reade of this innocent plagiarism he retorted savagely:

'Yes; I did 'collar' it. What then? If you'll say anything as smart I'll 'collar' that too!'

After that I concluded to let him alone for the rest of the journey.

Apropos of 'Dora,' it has apparently escaped notice that the phrase 'the grand old man' (since conferred by the voice of a nation on an old man grander still!) was originally applied by this peerless maiden to Farmer Allan. (*See* page 38 of the play.)

After lying perdu many years this charming work was ultimately produced at the Adelphi, 1st June 1867. Unfortunately, it did not attract, which the author attributed to certain shortcomings in the scenery. Ten years later he wrote a pamphlet in which he vivisected the unfortunate painter who, he alleged, had damned the play. Once I ventured to plead on behalf of his victim that he was dead.

'So is my piece, sir, and the ruffian killed it—murdered it!—for it was nothing less than murder!—

'Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange and unnatural!'

I've no patience to think of it!—the flesh and blood, and bones and brains of two great men—a great poet and a great dramatist—murdered by a wretched dauber!'

'But,' I replied, 'he was not a wretched dauber.

On the contrary he was a very admirable painter. He was good enough for Charles Fechter who was himself a painter and a sculptor; and when I opened my new theatre he painted all the scenery, and he didn't kill "Hamlet."'

'Because he couldn't: but he would have done it if he could! But there! there! you never saw the scene: you never saw the sun. There never was such a sun in the heavens, or on the earth, or in the waters under the earth! It was a beastly sun—a sun which went to bed drunk, and got up groggy in the morning looking like a blazing copper warming-pan!'

But there! there! read this and spare my speech,' and with that, he thrust the pamphlet into my hand.

Since George Colman the Younger's ferocious onslaught on John Kemble in the first edition of 'The Iron Chest,' nothing has been seen which, for ferocity, can compare with the vivisection of this poor painter. I reproduce it here as a curiosity on the gentle art of Vituperation.

'Dora' was rehearsed about ten years ago, at the Adelphi Theatre, under promising auspices. There are but five characters, and they were in able hands: Farmer Allan, Mr H. Neville; Luke Blomfield, Mr Billington; William Allan, Mr Ashley; Dora, Miss Kate Terry; Mary Morrison, Miss Hughes.

These artists all entered into their parts: the play was acted at rehearsal—as all plays ought to be—and so we knew what we were about; and I felt so strong in my actors that I was not much alarmed when I found the scene-painter was disorderly. Alas! I underrated the *destructive* powers of a drunkard and a fool!

In the drama, as in the poem, the cornfield plays a principal part, not only because a field of ripe wheat is a beautiful sight and a great exploit of nature, but because it is on the old farmer's joy and pride in his crop that Dora relies to soften him towards his step-daughter and his grandchild, and to make her own experiment on his feelings less hazardous.

I begged more than once to see this cornfield, but I never could get a sight of it on the stage nor even on the frame; and, unfortunately, my friend Mr Webster was out of town, and ill, or he would have kept the play back until he *had* seen it.

The drama was produced and played to perfection. Neville put off his youth, and was the lion-hearted old farmer with a bosom that could suffer but a will that could not bend. Kate Terry, as Dora, gave the world such a picture of womanly sweetness, timidity, and goodness, as none who saw it can forget; Mr Ashley, though out of his line, was far too intelligent to fall short; Miss Hughes, in her small part, was perfect, and spoke the poet's own lines to music exquisitely; and Mr Billington excelled himself. He played the young farmer—tender, but broad and manly—to the life, and, thanks to him, my creation melted into the poet's, and no spectator could tell them apart. I owe this tribute to my good cousins in the great and beautiful dramatic art, 'Tis a debt of honour, and must be paid.'

The first act is in the farmer's kitchen. The kitchen was tolerably painted, the lines were played to perfection, and the act went like a charm.

The next act passes in green pastures, with the immortal Brook running through them. By the side of that brook Dora sings to William, who is now a dying man, Tennyson's immortal song, 'The Brook.'

Well, the Adelphi stream was composed of a large wheel, hung with some pieces of fleecy hosiery and spangles. By the side of this fine old theatrical substitute for water, Kate Terry sang 'The Brook,' as only actresses can sing, and her genius prevailed over the cotton and spangles, though a ridiculous libel upon one of the loveliest things in nature—beautiful in shade, beautiful in sunlight, beautiful even in the gaslight or limelight of a theatre.

That act passed off well enough.

The act-drop rose on the third act—the cornfield. We all know how the poet has painted it; and his picture was in the scene-painter's hands as a guide;

but that gentleman preferred his own ideas of corn. He gave us the flowery mound and two wheat sheaves, but his stage-cloth represented a turnpike road, with three rows of cut stubble (property), and his cornfield was a shapeless mass streaked with fiery red and yellow ochre. A cornfield! We might just as well have called it the Red Sea, or a Roman arena splashed with the gore of lions and gladiators. Indeed, we might have called it anything, for it represented nothing. It was what it was, a horizon-cloth primed with blood and ochre and drunken impudence.

The public stared with wonder at the unearthly phenomenon—wonder, but no displeasure. There was as yet no distinct ground for offence, since not a soul in front, except the poor author, could possibly divine what the monstrous thing was intended to libel.

But this apathy ceased when Farmer Allan came on and interpreted the daub.

'Dora, my girl, come to have a look at the wheat?'

Once informed that the splashes of blood and ochre on that cloth were wheat, every cockney who had voyaged into the bowels of the land as far as Richmond began to snigger.

But when the old farmer persisted in an illusion he had all to himself the merriment swelled; and Farmer Allan's lines, which you will find to be continuous in the book, were broken into dialogue on that occasion. ('Dora,' p. 39.)

'Allan (*turning round and eyeing the standing wheat*). 'Tis a fine sight, isn't it?

The Stalls (*with admirable promptitude*). He! he! he!

The Pit (*with a sort of after-clap*). Haw! haw!

Allan. I haven't had as full a crop this six years.

Pit and Stalls (*together*). Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

Allan. Six quarters to the acre, if there's a bushel.

Pit, Gallery, and Stalls. He! he! ha! ha! haw! haw! ho! ho!

ALLAN. Opens a farmer's heart it does to stand and look at a sixty-acre field of wheat like that.
(Howls of laughter from floor to gallery.)'

Now, a play may be laughed at in one place and admired in many, provided the cause of ridicule passes away; and it *does* pass away, when the one mistake is due to the author or to an actor. In such cases there is no more permanent harm done than when the periodical cat, after watching for a sentimental scene (as patiently as cats unconnected with the fine arts do for a mouse) traverses the stage behind the performers and excites incongruous guffaws: her exit composes the powerful minds her entrance had overthrown.

But, when the scene-painter is the criminal — a thing that I believe has never happened to any author in the memory of man but unfortunate me, and when the cause of ridicule is a set scene, which lasts the whole third act, the play is murdered, and the author and his actors assassinated!

The last act of 'Dora' all but failed: yet it is the great act; it is the Tennysonian act; it was grandly played, and even my share in it is the best thing I ever wrote in my life. But that drunkard's work stuck there all the time; insulting sense, and tickling the audience out of tune with the strong and tender and beautiful things that were done before them under the withering shadow of burlesque. The very critics (so few even of them can decipher the errors of the theatre and see where each fault really lies) went away honestly thinking that the third act of 'Dora' was worse *written* than its predecessors. That I shall put to the test by submitting the book to their successors.

Mr Webster thought otherwise, and discharged the pictorial assassin. But punishment is no cure: sacking the Colorado beetle, when he has vented his eggs, will not save the potato-field.

When the organs of opinion had all confounded the bibulous idiot with his writhing victim, the

author, and had denounced Reade, and lauded Tennyson, and run down the great Tennysonian act of the play, and eulogised the first act, which happens to be all Reade, *then* our Aceldama—or field of blood and ochre—was mitigated; but to the last it never resembled a cornfield, and, therefore, never aided the lines, as it ought to do, by a beautiful and appropriate picture of that glorious sight—a large field of standing wheat.

The play was played forty nights, and then dismissed. It is remembered with respect by every actor, but quite forgotten by the London public. It crossed the water, and was played at Boston, Massachusetts, but ruthlessly shorn of our leading feature, pictorial inebriety. They played it fifty successive nights and thirty afternoons to crowded houses—being the greatest success (so I am told) any theatre in Boston had achieved since the city was built. I know their cast: it was a respectable one; but not on a par with ours at the Adelphi. Their superiority lay in their scene-painter and their audience; ours in our actors. Yet they succeeded prodigiously: we all but failed.

Confirmed in my belief on the subject by the history of my drama in London and Boston, I now propose, after suffering unjustly ten mortal years for the fault of another man, to appeal to a new tribunal. I beg leave to gauge the intellects of a new audience, and to have fair play on the stage as other authors do.

Boston audiences are, no doubt, somewhat ahead of London audiences in culture and sense of the beautiful; but it does not follow they are more than ten years ahead. I hope to find in London, A.D. 1877, an audience as intelligent as Boston audiences were in 1867, and to give the London audience as fair a chance of judging me fairly as the Boston audience had.

With this view I have been to my good friend Mr W. Hann, and got the scenery painted *my* way this time. Mr Hann has every quality of an artist

(except inebriety); and it has been a labour of love with him to design appropriate pictures worthy of Tennyson's 'Dora' and paint them with his own hand.

These pictures would, I think, please the poet himself. They are suggested by his lines, not mine; and I now offer them, with Mrs Tom Taylor's music, and my drama, to the London managers on this side of the Thames and Temple Bar. The music is a series of *melodies*, strictly appropriate to the sentiment of each scene, and includes that lady's exquisite song, 'The Brook.'

I hope my friends, the London managers, will excuse my approaching them for once, in this novel method. The case is exceptional. There is no other instance on record of such a drama as 'Dora,' with two such names to it, being shelved indefinitely, because an obscure scene-painter drank, daubed, and died ten years ago.

I hope, too, that the critics of the day will not take it an ill compliment if I respectfully ask them to look at the *book* of 'Dora,' and decide between their predecessors and me whether the play really declines in merit after the first act, and whether I am unreasonable, or premature, in asking for another trial with my own scenery.

Despite the new scenery and this piteous appeal for redress, the managers remained obdurate, and the unfortunate play was relegated to the shelf, scenery and all, till some four or five years later.

Soon after the withdrawal of 'Dora' from the Adelphi the author wrote another play called 'The Double Marriage,' founded upon Macquet's drama of 'Le Chateau Grantier.' This adaptation had been previously sent on approval to various managers, who, as usual, 'didn't look at it.'

Thereupon he made a novel of it (see *ante*), called 'White Lies,' which was published serially in the *London Journal*. In doing so he had so

strengthened the story that he was induced to put it back into dramatic form, and made a new play of it, which he sent to me for production.

Finding that I was struck with it he said: 'I'm glad you like it, because, to tell you the truth, Vining doesn't care for it, and the failure of 'Dora' has shut me up at the Adelphi, so I'm barred out as usual. The part would suit you down to the ground. Will you do it?'

'No! Without the London hall-mark 'twould be useless in the country.'

'But we did without it in "Never too Late."'

'Ah, that was a big, popular subject. Besides, I was prepared to lose money on that, and did, to start it, but I'm in the mortar tub now' (I was building my new theatre at Leeds), 'and have no money to throw away.'

'Then I'm done, for there's no chance of placing it in town.'

'Why don't you try the new theatre?'

'What new theatre?'

'You remember St Martin's Hall? Well, yesterday I met Phipps, the architect, in Long Acre. He took me in, and showed me all over the place. He's transmogrifying it into a theatre for Lionel Lawson of the *Daily Telegraph*. Labouchere has taken it. I presume you know him?'

'I only know that Charles Lever told me that he was the eccentric attaché who was the hero of 'A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance.''

'Precisely! Well, he's taken the place for a term of years.'

'Oh, indeed! *Qui bella la donna?*'

'There isn't one yet. He's got an idea about Art.'

'The deuce he has! Who'd have suspected that 'Labby' had an idea about anything?'

'He has ideas about many things, as you'll see by-and-by; meanwhile, his present notion is to run his Theatre on a new plan!'

'Indeed! How does he mean to set about it?'

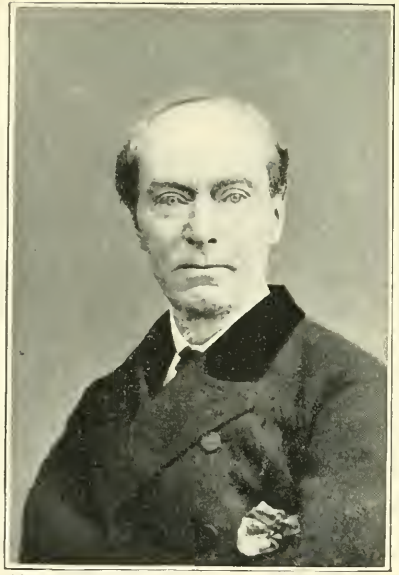

Photo by Lombardi]

CHARLES MATHEWS

Photo by C. Silvy, Bayswater]

PATTY OLIVER

AS THE BONNIE FISHWIFE

Photo by Heath & Bean, London]

ALFRED WIGAN

'To begin with, he's engaged Alfred Wigan to manage for him. You know him, of course?'

'Slightly.'

'Well, try him!'

'And get 'Dora,' and that d—d scene-painter flung in my teeth?'

'Never mind that! Tell Alfred the Great that Romeo has never been acted, and that you've written a mature Romeo expressly for him!'

'Expressly for my grandfather! A Romeo of fifty?'

'True, O king—but, remember, he's a Blighted Tragedian dying to distinguish himself for half-a-century.'

'Psha! Romeo with a bald head.'

'What does that signify? He can wear a wig——'

'So he can! Besides, he's not half a bad actor.'

'Bad actor! He's a deuced good one; and since John Mildmay: they'll stand him in anything.'

'So they will! To be sure he has a special gift for making poetry prose—but good prose (and his prose *is* good) is better than bad poetry any day in the week.* I'll try him to-morrow.'

He *did* try him the very next day, and Wigan accepted the piece for his opening night. Here, indeed, appeared a magnificent opportunity. A new, elegant, and commodious theatre in an eligible situation and a fashionable management with abundant capital at its back. Never was there a better chance for author to distinguish himself. The play, too, is 'an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.' Magnificent scenery, costumes and appointments

* I note in to-day's journals that the one and only Ibsen has issued an Imperial ukase inhibiting the use of verse on the stage, decreeing that in future prose must be the only medium.

Methinks I can hear the free-and-easy young gentlemen, to whom this archaic accomplishment is absolute Assyrian, jubilantly chortling: "Good old Ibsen! Right you are, old chappie!" —29th April 1903.

and a powerful, indeed an admirable company, were provided, including, besides Mr and Mrs Wigan, Miss Ellen Terry, Miss Fanny Addison, Charles Wyndham, Lionel Brough, and other distinguished artists. A few breezes had occurred at rehearsal, but they were mere summer storms and had been smoothed over. All was in good order: the author was sanguine, the actors hopeful, the management confident of success. An eager and excited multitude crammed the theatre from floor to dome on the opening night, 24th October 1867.

The play began well; the audience were pleased. As act succeeded act they became more and more interested. At last came the great situation of the fourth act, which, it was confidently anticipated, would take the house by storm. And it did—but not in the way the author intended.

Josephine, the heroine of 'The Double Marriage,' has given birth to a child under circumstances which, though ultimately explained satisfactorily, appear at the moment most compromising. The child is discovered; the unfortunate mother's honour, happiness, her very life are at stake. In this supreme moment her sister, a single young girl, the incarnation of truth, purity, and innocence, comes forward in the presence of her affianced husband and her mother, the haughty Comptesse Grandpré, and, to save Josephine from shame, brands herself with infamy. Taking the child in her arms she declares it is her own!

I can conceive no dramatic situation in existence stronger than this. To the well-grounded skill of Miss Ellen Terry was entrusted this striking incident. This distinguished actress had retired suddenly and unexpectedly from public life. Her disappearance was shrouded in mystery; hence, when she emerged from retirement, her first appearance was looked forward to with eager and unwonted interest. She was fully equal to the occasion; her form dilated, her eyes sparkled with fire, her voice trembled as she exclaimed in tones of passionate emotion: '*I* am its mother!'

At this moment, Reade told me that there burst forth a roar of derision which shook the building, and a howl of savage laughter arose which he should never forget if he lived to the age of Old Parr. The curtain fell amidst yells, and the piece was doomed there and then. Indeed, it was only kept in the bill until something could be prepared to take its place.

Although the presence of that unfortunate baby was fatal to 'The Double Marriage,' at or about that very time another theatre was being crowded nightly with audiences, which not only tolerated the wonderful D'Alroy baby in the last act of 'Caste,' but 'gushed' at it. The critics who saw genius in the one piece, could detect nothing but the quintessence of absurdity in the other. The adage that one man may steal a horse and ride off on its back in triumph, while, if the other looks over the hedge, he is dragged off to durance vile, was never more appositely illustrated than on this occasion.

Decidedly 'The British public is a fine, practical, consistent animal.'

'Never too Late' had proved an 'Open Sesame,' and the author was riding triumphant on the tide, which 'taken at the flood leads to fortune,' when lo! the luckless 'Dora' cast him among the breakers, and the still more luckless 'Double Marriage' landed him high and dry on the beach!

Failure upon failure!—two of them within six months of each other.

At the very moment when he felt assured that he had got firm hold of the dramatic public, hey presto! the phantom vanished, and the unfortunate author had to begin all over again.

CHAPTER II

LIFE AT ALBERT GATE

Tempest in a Teacup—Defence of Plagiarism—Reade's systematic Mode of Work—Scrap Books—Note Books—Guard Books and Agendas — Pictures and Paragraphs — Letters from Celebrities — His "Copy" and his Copyist — Auto-Criticism on "Christie Johnstone"—Falls foul of the anonymous Author of "Poets and Players" in *Fraser's*—Macready's "Macbeth" —Ingenious and highly probable Theory of Stage Traditions —Plea for a National State-aided Theatre — Work done, Reception follows—Visitors, Suitors, and Parasites dismissed — To Town and back loaded with Fruit and Flowers — Table-Talk—Statesmen—Authors—Poets — Painters, Players, Parsons, etc.—A quiet Game at Whist—Defeated by Psycho —Pleasant Dinners—Edwin James Q.C.—Phelps and Fechter —Charles Mathews and Dion Boucicault—*Et hoc genus omnes*

The failure of 'Dora' and 'The Double Marriage' embittered the author's life, and the stings of the gadflies of the Press goaded him to such absolute fury that in the exuberance of his boyish anger he became so amusing that I couldn't refrain from laughing at him; then the tigerish roar of anger would change to a leonine roar of laughter.

One of these gentlemen, having traced the origin of the play to Macquet, accused Reade of being a plagiarist.

'Plagiarist,' he roared, crushing the paper in his fist and striding up and down. 'Of course I am a plagiarist, Chaucer was a plagiarist, Shakespeare was a plagiarist, Molière was a plagiarist. We all plagiarise, all except those d—d idiots who are too asinine to profit by learning from the works of their superiors!

Surely to God every blockhead out of a lunatic asylum (except these idiots) must know, that, since Homer's time, all authors have parodied his incidents and paraphrased his sentiments. Molière 'took his own where he found it.' 'The thief of all thieves was the Warwickshire thief,' who stole right and left from everybody; but then he 'found things lead and left them gold.' That's the sort of thief I am!

You may laugh! No one feels the tight boot but the fellow who wears it (that's why *I* stick to cloth ones!); but I tell you what it is, I am sick of the insolence, the ignorance, and the intolerable stupidity of the great unwashed, who arrogate to themselves the right to form and guide public opinion. My disadvantage among these boobies is because I wear clean linen (to which they have a constitutional abhorrence), write the English language (which they don't understand), and because I belong to the 'not inconsiderable class of men who have not the advantage of being dead'! While Byron and Scott and Keats and Shelley were alive the precursors of these vermin stung and irritated them. Living, they were very small potatoes; dead, they are giants. There's one comfort, when I 'move over' I shall take my proper place, and leave these sweeps to the congenial occupation of making mud pies wherewith to bespatter the coming race of authors.

Oh, laugh, laugh away and be hanged to you; you make me laugh too, in spite of myself, you young beggar.

Away you go, hail a cab for the boat-race. A four-wheeler mind and a good horse, or we shall miss the start."

We didn't miss it. We got aboard the umpire's boat, and Leo wrote a splendid account of it (he was a great authority on the subject) for the *Pall Mall*, and by the time we got back to dinner he had forgotten there was such a thing as a criticaster (a word of his coining) in the world.

Apropos of plagiarism, I disgress for a moment to mention that quite recently I have discovered a

remarkable coincidence between a story of his entitled 'The Picture,' and another story, called 'What the Papers Revealed,' by an anonymous writer, in the twentieth volume of *St James' Magazine*, page 8. Both tales are distinctly derived from the same French source: in fact, Reade made his a tale of the Terror; the other adapter has laid his *donnée* in England; but it is to be observed neither one writer nor the other alluded directly or indirectly to the original source of his inspiration!

There is also in an early volume of *Household Words* a story from which 'Single Heart and Double Face' appears to be derived.

Yet Mr Charles L. Reade positively assures me that the story of 'The Picture' was founded upon an incident which Bulwer related to Reade over the dinner-table at Knebworth; that this play of 'Single Heart' (never acted!) was founded upon a single anecdote which he himself translated from the German for his father's use! *Q.E.L.*

During my frequent visits to Albert Gate I had ample opportunities for observing Reade's systematic mode of going to work. He scoffed at the idea of burning "the midnight oil." Maintaining that a man of letters had no right to lead the life of a recluse, he worked in the early part of the day, the rest he devoted to society. Literature was the business of his life, society its relaxation.

He got up at eight, skimmed the papers, and breakfasted at nine. He had a healthy, almost a voracious appetite, and usually made a substantial meal which set him up for the day. Fish, flesh, eggs, potatoes, fruit—nothing came amiss to him. From breakfast-time he never tasted anything till dinner, at seven, or, when he went to the theatre, at six. From ten till one or two he stuck to the desk. One chapter of twelve pages (double the size of foolscap) he considered a fair average day's work. I have often sat with him for hours together, he writing—I reading, or perhaps studying some new part, without our exchanging one word. Sometimes,

indeed, he would jump up, and say, 'my muse 'labours,' but the jade won't be 'delivered.' Come into the garden, John, and let's have a jaw.' After a few minutes' talk he would return to his work with redoubled ardour.

One day every week was devoted to his agendas and scrap-books. Magazines and papers of every description, from all parts of the world, were piled round him in shoals. Armed with a long pair of scissors, sharp and glittering as a razor, he would glance over a whole sheet, spot out a salient article or paragraph — a picturesque illustration from *Harper's* or *Frank Leslie's Pictorial*, the *Graphic*, *Illustrated London News*, the *London Journal*, down to the *Police News*—snip went the scissors, slash went the article as it dropped into the paper basket. During these operations he would sometimes pause to let out an exclamation of astonishment, or disgust, or a Gargantuan roar of laughter, or occasionally he would read a more than usually interesting paragraph aloud, and comment on it. When the slashing was completed, and the room was littered over in every corner, the maid was called in to clear away the debris—then came the revision. Paragraphs and illustrations were sifted, selected, approved, or rejected. Those that were approved were there and then pasted into scrap-books and duly indexed; long articles were stowed away into one or other of his agendas so methodically that he knew where to lay his hand upon them at a moment's notice. It was by this process that he prepared those wonderful store-houses of information which Sir Edwin Arnold describes thus: 'The enormous note-books which he compiled in the course of his various publications, with their elaborate system of reference and confirmation and their almost encyclopædic variety and range, will rank hereafter among the greatest curiosities of literature, and be a perennial monument of his artistic fidelity.'

To complete his record, and have the means of

referring at any moment to a dependable authority for verification of dates, etc., he always filed *Lloyd's Weekly News*, which he called his "epitome of current events."

I well remember with what pride his elder brother 'Bill the Squire' turned up one day with a volume of Lloyd's, which he had carefully indexed from the first page to the last.

Amongst other features of his workshop there used to be a couple of volumes full of remarkable letters from remarkable people.

A note from George H. Lewes states: 'An article by you that wouldn't be worth printing would be a curiosity in its way; it must be so infernally wrong. Are we never to see you on Sunday between five and six? We are always in, and generally get some good talkers to come.'

The other letters I am not at liberty to quote, but the endorsements are so quaint that, by his permission, I made notes of some of them, and quote a few.

One from Wilkie Collins is endorsed: 'An artist of the pen; there are terribly few amongst us.'

Martin Tupper: 'A man unreasonably pitched into; he is not the only man who has made an easy hit with a single book. Examples: 'Dame Europa's School,' 'Tom Brown's School-Days,' 'Rab and his Friends,' 'Self-Help,' 'Jane Eyre.' None of these writers could write two remarkable books if they wrote for ever.'

On the production of 'Never too Late to Mend,' Mr Tupper wrote the author to this effect: 'I desire to congratulate you heartily on having made popular so good and true a *refrain* as 'It is Never too Late to Mend.' Despair of good is the great and evil antagonist, which, so long as there is Life and Hope, it is worth any MAN'S while to try and conquer, and you possibly may have done more good by your acted morals at the Princess's than many bishops in many cathedrals. *Perge*, prosper.'

Photo by Elliot & Fry]

WILKIE COLLINS

Photo by Bean]

PALGRAVE SIMPSON

Kate Terry: 'The meekest, tenderest, and most intelligent actress of her day. Young in years but old in expression, and fuller of talent than an egg is of meat.'

Sothern: 'A dry humourist. I believe he professes to mesmerise, and is an imitator of the Davenport Brothers. He can get his hands out of any knot I can tie. His Dundreary is true comedy, not farce. He is as grave as a judge over it, and in that excellent quality a successor to Liston.'

Ada Menken: 'A clever woman with beautiful eyes, very dark blue. A bad actress, but made a hit by playing Mazeppa in tights. A quadrogamist. Her last husband was, I believe, John Heenan; I saw him fight Tom Sayers.* Goodish heart; loose conduct. *Requiescat in pace!*'

Ben Webster: 'An admirable actor when he happens to know his words.'

If any special information were needed upon a particular subject Reade had recourse to one or two humble followers whose success in literature had not been commensurate with their ambition. These gentlemen were employed to hunt up authorities, make excerpts, etc., at the British Museum, and thus it was that his fiction always appeared like fact.

In preparing his material for the press he was equally precise. He would rush off his copy in his great sprawling hand on huge sheets of drab-coloured paper—which, he alleged, rested and cooled his eyes—then carefully revise. This done, he would frequently read aloud to us chapter after chapter, and discuss incidents, treatment, etc. It was seldom that he did not avail himself of some suggestion, and frequently some happy thought would occur in the course of conversation. After the next revision the chapters were handed over to his copyist, who wrote a hand like copperplate; then came the final revise, if this did not deface the MS. too much it was sent

* So did I, and a very fine fight it was.—J. C.

to the printer; if, however, the MS. was illegible then a second copy was made. He had not always been so careful; *Punch* once declared that a perplexed compositor threw himself off Waterloo Bridge in a fit of despair occasioned by the illegibility of Reade's manuscript. He took this bad joke so much to heart that he thenceforward made legibility an imperative consideration.

The copyist who worked for him for years died under very distressing circumstances. Poor S. had been a prompter in his time. His was the old, old story: there had been a faithless wife, a deserted home, a motherless child who died. The man lost himself, took to drink, became a slave to it, and was a pitiable object to behold. This infirmity was the one of all others which Reade most loathed; yet he always bore with poor S., and did all he could to protect him from himself. If the unfortunate creature ever got a lump sum of money into his hands he melted it immediately in drink, hence it was always doled out to him by instalments. Latterly it became absolutely necessary to have the work done in the house. When I last saw him he came to draw some money; he took it without a word, and passed out like a man in a dream. A fortnight afterwards I read in the papers that he had been found dead, seated in a dilapidated chair in a dismantled garret, a horrible place festooned with cobwebs and reeking with filth. An empty gin bottle was by his side, the pipe which had fallen from his hand lay smashed to pieces on the ground, a few shillings were still left in his pocket. At the *post-mortem* examination the stomach was found to be entirely empty. It was stated that he had lived for years in this wretched den. He had never been known to receive a visitor, nor had any human being ever crossed his threshold from the time he took possession of it till they found him dead in the broken chair.

So thorough was Reade even at the beginning

of his career that, as before related, in order to acquire an accurate knowledge of the details requisite for the story of "Christie Johnstone," he lived amongst the fisher-folk for some time, and absolutely entered into the herring-fishery business as a commercial speculation, providing the requisite capital, and going out with these good people night after night on their fishing expeditions.

Amongst his unpublished papers he has left one, written at that period, endorsed thus:

AUTO-CRITICISM ON "CHRISTIE JOHNSTONE"

(Curious, and really not bad.)

'The author of 'Christie Johnstone' is full of details, but they are barren details. He deals in those minutiæ which are valuable according to the hand that mixes them, but he has not the art of mixing his materials. Hence the compound, with some exceptions, is dry and lumpy. . . . Mr Reade has good thoughts which he could clothe with logic, but he cannot dress them in the garb Fiction requires. . . .

He should associate himself with one of our authoresses: we have several whose abilities are his counterpart. He has plenty to tell us, and cannot tell it; they have nothing to say, and say it to perfection. The pair would produce a novel considerably above the average—something we should read with pleasure *and lay aside* with delight.'

In another unpublished paper he falls foul of the author of a somewhat atrabilious article published in *Fraser* (1858), called 'Poets and Players.' The writer (anticipating Sir Francis Burnand by more than a quarter of a century) starts with the assumption that Shakespeare's are not good acting plays for our days; that they are two hundred years too late; that they may do very well for the closet; that the actors of the time (including Macready,

Kean, Phelps, etc.) were incapable of comprehending the bard, or of acting him so as to interest the public, etc.

It is perfectly delightful to see the ease with which this superfine gentleman is shut up by our author, who commences by pointing out that, besides being a poet, Shakespeare was not only a manager, but actually a player; that the criticasters who pretend to an intimate and perfect knowledge of the unacted and unactable plays of the great master absolutely know nothing whatever about him, except through the medium of the familiar acting plays and the inspired utterances of the very players whom they constantly endeavour to depreciate.

In confirmation of this statement Reade affirms that if ninety-nine out of a hundred of these learned pundits were asked who was the author of the lines 'Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!' and 'Richard's himself again!' they would unhesitatingly reply: 'Why, Shakespeare, of course!'

After a glowing eulogy upon Macready's 'Macbeth'—which he (Reade) alleges threw more light upon the subject in three short hours than all the tedious twaddle critics and commentators have written in three centuries—he demolishes the assertion that 'Shakespeare's plays were made for the closet' by showing that the poems, the sonnets—'Venus and Adonis,' 'Lucrece,' etc., which were really intended for the closet—were published in the poet's lifetime, while the plays which were intended for the stage were jealously kept in manuscript, and were only to be seen or heard through the medium of their especially chosen interpreters, the players, till after the play-wright's death!

The position Leo assumes towards the players in this article reminds one not a little of Johnson's attitude to Garrick. Ursa major would bully 'little Davy' himself, but woe betide any outsider who attempted to lay profane hands on the great little man while Bruin was to the fore!

Having all my life urged by every means in my power the desirability, nay, the absolute necessity for a national theatre—not only to preserve the national drama, but to preserve the art of acting it from extinction; and even beyond that, to preserve to posterity the art of speaking the language destined to rule the world at its highest standard of excellence—I quote from him who "being dead yet speaketh" trumpet-tongued on this subject.

Here are *his* words:

"Shakespeare found in his day actors who, though since eclipsed, could speak his greatest lines up to his intention, and more to his mind than he could himself: this is proved by his taking the second-rate parts in his own plays. (*N.B.*—The only manager in creation that ever did this or ever will. Que voulez-vous?) He was Shakespeare in this too. *Fraser's* decision against the Macbeth and Hamlet of actors is therefore resolvable into *Fraser versus* Shakespeare.

Comparison of subjects ends the moment the adjective 'bad' is covertly introduced inside a substantive: bad speaking misleads the weak mind as to the nature of speech; bad acting misleads the muddle-head about the meaning of the word-acting.

The real condition of words is this: written words are the fair, undisfigured corpses of spoken words. A vulgar actor, or any bad speaker, mutilates these corpses more or less; but an artist of the tongue, like Macready, Rachel, or Stirling, restores to those corpses the soul and sunlight they had when in the author's brain and breast.

Since a comparative slur has been thrown on Mr Macready's 'Macbeth' by this anonymous writer, we will join issue on that ground.

Let literary critics inspect these lines:

> 'Better be with the dead,
> Whom we to gain our place have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave.

> After Life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
> Treason has done its worst: nor steel, nor poison,
> Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
> Can touch him further.'

and afterwards hear Macready speak them. If they have not (as many of our literary friends have!) ears too deaf and uncultivated to judge the triumphs of speech, they will acknowledge they could never have gathered for themselves all the heavenly, glowing beauty this artist restores to the stumbling letter of the text.

No private reader could ever *see* these words as Glover used to *fire* them in the 'Clandestine Marriage':

'Will Sir John take Fanny without a fortune? No! After you have settled the largest part of your property on your youngest daughter, can there be an equal portion left the elder? No! Doesn't this overturn the whole system of the family? Yes!'

And this force is *not* superadded, as our critic might think; it comes in *most* cases by *oral* descent from the author.

What mere reader could see the full value of the '*Zaire, vous pleurez*' of Voltaire? The author did. Actors have succeeded to his *mind* as well as his *syllables*, and it is only by the stage these words are still Voltaire, and more than his shadow.

The reader of 'Otway' comes to these words, '*Remember Twelve!*'* He sees nothing in them, and passes on. Yet for years these words were never spoken on the stage without a round of applause.

'*Il se souvient*,' says Rachel, in 'Le Vieux de la Montagne.' A murmur of admiration bursts from the cold but intelligent Theatre Français; yet what are those words to any mere reader?

Read the little modern play called 'Time Tries All': you are untouched by the letters of which it is composed, yet when Stirling gives the author to the public, bearded men are seen crying; and so it is more or less in all plays; less so in Shakespeare's

* Belvidera in "Venice Preserved."

or Sheridan's than in unreadable plays; but the distinction is one of degree, not kind. Shakespeare's gain as much in themselves as the diamond by being shaped and polished. The dumb-play, that great pictorial narrative, is the ground-work of all human plays; the words are but the flowers.

Whoever can measure human talent has observed that a novel, equal or a little inferior to a given play, is thrice as attractive to read; and why? Because the novelist paints the dumb-play of his characters, and with his best colours too; the dramatist is obliged to leave this to the stage, and the stage does it. Such, then, is the double force of speaking, looks, and burning words that it is impossible any play can be in the closet what it can be on the stage, if well acted.

It is always the fate of the stage to be most talked of by those who know least about it!

The stage is the unique repository of oral traditions in lettered nations.

The melodies Ophelia sings, and her pretty ballad twang, have come from mouth to mouth since Shakespeare's time, engraved on the boards, not printed in the volumes. The business of the stage, the positions of the personages, are in many cases Shakespeare's own; and it is not to be doubted by those who know the stage that hundreds and thousands of Shakespeare's own tones and inflections live on the stage and by the stage—to perish with the stage, the towers, the palaces, the temples, and the globe.

Non omnia possumus omnes.

The senses, like the stage, are what man chooses to make them. They are avenues by which, if well kept, wisdom and beauty have access to the soul. They can also be left fallow, blunted, perverted, or degraded. Wherefore, the stage is of service to man by preserving the great sense of hearing from slowness, rusticity, and degradation, and the great and godlike art of speech from being lost! Ay! from being utterly lost!

They have heard to little purpose who have not

discovered how much mouthing and very little correct speaking there is in churches, courts of law, Parliament, and society. Great speaking there is none, except on the stage—where there is so devilish little. This need not be so, must not be so, will not be so, *shall* not be so! But so long as it *is* so, let us work from the centre which does exist, and *create a circumference* (i.e. *a National Theatre*)!

Let us foster the unique germ of this great art. Let the stage be chastised, not stabbed; lashed, not barbarously tomahawked. Let the average manager cease to carry his want of morals to stupidity, and his want of intellect to a crime. Let the average actor (that strange, mad lump of conceit, ignorance, and stale tricks) be compelled to learn something (at present he is the one spectator who learns nothing) from those true artists of the tongue, the face, and the person, who now place art in vain by the side of his threadbare artifice; who portray the emotions with various and true looks; and whose golden lips shoot great words to the ear, burning and breathing a beauty, a glory, a music, and a life, that those words can never carry to the soul through the cold and uncertain medium of the eye!'

When I turn from these eloquent and burning words to my own prosaic periods, I protest I feel as methinks I ought to feel were I doomed to descend from heaven to earth. Yet can I not deny myself a last word on a subject so dear to my heart, a subject of such vital importance to the English-speaking race in every part of the habitable globe.

Apart from the potentiality of the pleasure, the delight it affords us, it surely cannot be even questioned that the Drama is the most potent educational medium in existence!

This fact is practically recognised by every nation in Europe except our own! There is not the smallest town on the Continent which does not possess a Theatre subsidised either by the

Government or the Municipality. This movement has spread even to Russia!

Emulating Napoleon—who at Tilsit decreed the laws which to this day sway the house of Molière—while Siberia still awaits development, and Manchuria annexation, the Autocrat, still in the prime of youthful manhood, has ordered an Imperial Commission to report on the progress of dramatic art in all the Russias. *This report declares unanimously that the Theatre cannot be considered to stand on the same level as other places of amusement; that its Educational influence is of importance to the state; and that, therefore, the Theatre has the right to demand the protection and assistance of the Government!*

This is the action of Russia—of barbarous, uncivilised, illiterate, aggressive Russia! Yet here, in the metropolis of the world, although for weeks past the business of the Commons has been blocked by the New Education Bill, not one man in the House has even mentioned the name of the Theatre as an Educational medium. Yes, here where we have the noblest Drama, hallowed by the noblest traditions of dramatic art in the world, we look supinely on, while both are perishing for lack of sustenance!

It must not be imagined that I intend, even by a hint or an inference, to disparage the work done by individual enterprise.

Irving and Wyndham, Barrett and Tree, Harrison and Maude and Alexander have done much, and will doubtless do more; but when they are gone, what then?

"Men may come and men may go,"

but the Drama should endure for ever.

Even the good work that these distinguished artists have done will be utterly lost unless some means are speedily taken to preserve it.

Think of that, O gentleman of the Commons and the County Council!—and you, Sire, most illustrious of all play-goers, at whose breath arose the moribund

Imperial Institute!—and you, O multi-millionaires, who have more money than you know what to do with!—and ye, O feckless play-actors, who do not comprehend that your delightful art is designed for nobler ends than the mere beguilement of the after-dinner *ennui* of sybarites and sensualists!—Awake! Arise! Unite! Agitate! and remember "God helps those who help themselves!"

After this digression let us return to Albert Gate.

Work done, from two to four was devoted to receiving company. People of every description came — with or without introductions, especially our transatlantic cousins (He was very partial to America and Americans!), "swells," brother-authors, actors, and actresses, especially the latter. Some of them had never acted, but they only needed the opportunity to "set the Thames on fire"; others had acted, but had been "crushed" by managers, and were "resting for want of something to do."

Here, too, came with her sorrow the wife of a famous soldier, who had compromised himself by a scandalous indiscretion which wrecked a brilliant career. He had paid dearly and justly for his folly, had suffered twelve months' imprisonment had been degraded and dismissed from the service. One would have thought that this punishment might have sufficed; but at that particular period we were subject to one of our periodical attacks of ferocious morality—Mrs Grundy (dear old soul!) was up in arms—hence the price of the culprit's commission was forfeited, and his wife and children were left to starve! This excited my compassion and my indignation. Grave and important considerations deterred Reade from taking action at that moment in the matter, but he sympathised so deeply with this unfortunate lady that he urged me 'to bell the cat.' Nothing loth, I penned a letter denouncing this scandalous injustice. He revised the epistle, pointed a line or two with words of fire, put it into the hands of his copyist, and sent a copy to each of the influential journals, not one

of which deigned to insert it. Two or three months later he himself wrote a temperate and dignified appeal for mercy—alas! in vain.

The broken soldier, ostracised and exiled, was compelled to devote to a foreign potentate the sword he was no longer permitted to wield on behalf of his country.

After years of banishment the regiment he had once led to glory arrived at Alexandria. He went on board ship to greet his old comrades. By a happy inspiration the band struck up "Auld Lang Syne"; then, as by magic, insular frigidity melted like snow before the sun, military discipline was cast to the winds, while a cohort of bronzed and bearded warriors cast themselves at the feet of their lost leader, shouting like maniacs, shrieking like women, and weeping like children. Nor they alone; for when the wire brought the news to England, and the writer of these lines took it down to Albert Gate, two men and a woman wept also.

It was their infirmity to be "built that way."

They had never even seen this wrecked and ruined Free Lance, but they knew that at the fateful moment when his accuser clung to the doorstep of the flying railway carriage, she appealed to him to save her or she must fall and be dashed to pieces!" They knew, too, that a cur would have saved himself; but he was a man, and saved her—to his own undoing.

He is dead now; so may his faults lie gently on him. Shame to say, however, from that day to this restitution has not been made to the wife and children who were so cruelly defrauded in the name of moral and military discipline.

Upon another occasion I encountered a wretched woman who had been mixed up in that dreadful 'Penge' business. She came to express her gratitude to the man who had the courage to arraign an eminent judge at the bar of public opinion and impugn his law — the man who restored her to freedom, and unquestionably saved the lives of the miserable Stauntons.

Hither, too, came disappointed poets, play-wrights, escaped lunatics, broken-down sailors, ticket-of-leave men, etc. To most of these the host would give a patient hearing, and not unfrequently consolation, advice, and assistance.

Our visitors disposed of, we made our way to town, usually devoting a couple of hours to the club or our friends, generally winding up in Covent Garden, from whence we returned to dinner, laden with fruit and flowers whenever they were in season. Lunch mine host never took. 'It is an insult to one's breakfast,' he alleged, 'and an outrage on one's dinner.' The menu, unless upon state occasions, commenced with fish; soup he despised. His taste in the former was peculiar. He preferred herring (which, when fresh from the sea, he always maintained was the most delicate and delicious fish that ever came to table) to turbot, sole to salmon. The next course consisted of mutton (beef he abominated) or white meats, followed by game, pastry, and fruit, washed down by sparkling wine, of which he was a connoisseur. During all our acquaintance I never saw him taste a glass of beer, and he loathed the very smell of tobacco; spirits he rarely or ever tasted. Once, however, when he was staying with us in the country, my landlord, who was a famous wine-merchant, made me a present of a case of wonderful white Santa-Cruz rum. It was very old, and made into punch was a most insidious beverage. On one occasion, when we came home cold and weary from a long night rehearsal, I broached a bottle, made it into punch and tempted Reade into tasting it. He took to it very kindly. Indeed, during the remainder of his visit, he invariably looked out for a night-cap of this pleasant tipple. Next time I came to town I brought with me a dozen bottles, and he used to say nightly to Egeria: 'Produce the poisoned bowl. This young villain is always leading me into temptation. If I 'fall into evil,' it will be his fault.'

In our moments of confidence he preferred to talk about his plays rather than his books. I pre-

ferred to talk about the latter, especially about his masterpiece, 'The Cloister and the Hearth.' The labour and research involved in this remarkable work were enormous, yet it was nearly strangled at its birth. As before stated, when originally brought out under the name of 'A Good Fight' in *Once a Week*, its publication was suspended in consequence of the Editor's tampering with the "copy," an indignity which the author resented by breaking off further relations and abruptly and unsatisfactorily winding up the story. Ultimately, however, it saw the light in a complete form under its present well-known title.

The unfortunate Editor of this journal was shortly afterwards immured in a lunatic asylum, whereupon Reade made one of his characteristic remarks. 'Poor fellah!' he said, 'poor fellah! I'm sorry for him. Of course, I'm bound to be sorry as a Christian, but what else could be expected from a fellah who presumed to tamper with my copy?'

In discussing the merits of his works (he was by no means averse to discussion on this or any other subject, except politics and the Athanasian Creed, both of which he avoided and detested) I always maintained the supremacy of 'The Cloister and the Hearth' over all his other books; but in this case, as in the drama, his barometer was failure or success, and he declared that he would never go out of his own age again. 'I write for the public,' he said, 'and the public don't care about the dead. They are more interested in the living, and in the great tragi-comedy of humanity that is around and about them and environs them in every street, at every crossing, in every hole and corner. An aristocratic divorce suit, the last great social scandal, a sensational suicide from Waterloo Bridge, a woman murdered in Seven Dials, or a baby found strangled in a bonnet-box at Piccadilly Circus, interests them much more than Margaret's piety or Gerard's journey to Rome. For one reader who has read 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' a thousand have read 'It is Never too

Late to Mend.' The paying public prefers a live ass to a dead lion. *Similia similibus:* why should the ass not have his thistles? Besides, thistles are good, wholesome diet for those who have a stomach for them. No, no! No more doublet and hose for me; henceforth I stick to trousers. Now, after that, if you please, pass the wine and change the subject.'

Of all his contemporaries he yielded the palm to Dickens, and to him alone. Him he always acknowledged as his master.

Next for variety and scope came Bulwer Lytton.

Carlyle, he said, was a 'Johnsonian pedant, bearish, boorish and bumptious, egotistical and atrabilious. His Teutonic English was barbarous and cacophonous; yet, notwithstanding, every line he wrote was permeated with vigour and sincerity, and his 'Cromwell' is a memorial of two great men—the hero and the author.'

Macaulay always posed himself,

> 'As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
> And when I ope my lips let no dog bark!''

but with this intellectual arrogance he combined a grand rhythmical style, a marvellous learning, and a miraculous memory.'

Disraeli was 'the most airy and vivacious of literary coxcombs, the most dexterous and dazzling of political harlequins, the most audacious of adventurers, the most lovable of men (when you got on his weak side), and, altogether, the most unique and remarkable personage of the age.'

Thackeray he designated 'an elegant and accomplished writer.' 'Esmond,' he added, 'is worthy of Addison at his best; but some of the 'Yellowplush Papers' would be a disgrace to Grub Street, and the miserable, personal attacks on Bulwer Lytton—who has written the best play, the best comedy, and the best novel of the age—are unworthy of a gentleman and a man of letters.'

Trollope 'wrote a good deal that was interesting and a good deal that was—not interesting.'

'For literary ingenuity in building up a plot and investing it with mystery, give me dear old Wilkie Collins against the world.'

'George Elliot's *metier* appears to me to consist principally in describing with marvellous accuracy the habits, manners, and customs of animalculæ as they are seen under the microscope.'

'Ouida has emerged from dirt to decency, and even dignity, and there is nothing in literature more touching and beautiful than the tale of 'Two Little Wooden Shoes.'

I remember one afternoon he commenced to read 'Ariadne.' Apparently he was trying to interest himself in the first chapter. By-and-by I heard him mutter, 'It was an Ariadne! It was a beautiful Ariadne! It was a divine Ariadne! It was Ariadne the invincible! Ariadne the all-subduing! Ariadne the omnipotent! Yes, no one could doubt that it was Ariadne!' As he shied the book to the other end of the room, to the imminent peril of the sheets of plate-glass with which it was lined, he impatiently exclaimed: 'Of course it was Ariadne! Who the deuce could doubt it after being told so a dozen times running, except as great an idiot as the author?'

'Miss Braddon is as quiet, as modest, and unassuming as she is accomplished. Her fertility of invention is boundless, her industry phenomenal, her style sound and vigorous, and she has rare dramatic instincts.'

'Rice is a capital fellow, and one of the best constructors of a story going.'

'Besant has fertility, invention, pathos, humour, power. Except that he is occasionally too discursive, he has all the qualities of a great author, and he is not yet at his zenith! The greatest is behind.'

'Payne's stories have beguiled me of many a weary hour. For accuracy of detail, ingenuity of construction, and sustained interest, he treads hard upon the heels of Wilkie Collins, while he has a quaint grace of manner and an occasional epigrammatic sprightliness all his own.'

During the unfortunate Oscar Wilde's "green carnation-and-sunflower" period, Reade remarked:

'Ah! that airy young gentleman is a *poseur*, there's no mistake about that; but he's a deuced sight cleverer than they think. A fellah doesn't take a double-first at Oxford for nothing; besides, he has written some noble lines. Then he knows a lot about art and nearly everything about painting. I saw him, one morning at the Academy, spot, with unerring accuracy, every picture worth looking at. It's true there were not a great many; but such as they were he spotted 'em.'

(At, or about this time, happening to meet this hapless genius at a garden-party at Miss Braddon's, I mentioned incidentally what Reade had said.

'Bai Jove!' exclaimed the creator of the Green Carnation, 'I'm delighted. I saw the old lion that day at the show, and longed to introduce myself; but he looked so austere and unapproachable that, with all my cheek, I dared not. Tell him so, and say, had I only known what he said to you, I should have been the proudest 'fella' in the Academy that day!')

'Hardy and Blackmore? Big men, sir, big—almost as big as they are made nowadays. Those two divine girls—'Bathsheba' and 'Lorna Doone'—I'm in love with 'em both, and I like the two men—I mean the labourer and the big fellah, John—John—I forget his name. When I read 'Lorna Doone' I can see Exmoor, smell the bracken, hear the rush of the roaring river.'

'Victor Hugo? Ah, now you speak of a demi-god!

> 'Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs and peep about!'

He is the one supreme genius of the epoch, but geniuses, unfortunately, sometimes have the nightmare like other people.'

'Georges Sand should have been a man, for she was a most manly woman.'

'Glorious old Alexandre Dumas has never been

properly appreciated; he is the prince of dramatists, the king of romancists, and the emperor of good fellows!'

'Walter Scott was one of the world's benefactors, and had the good luck to have the first innings in 'the land of the leal.'

Reade execrated poetasters, but adored poets, although he maintained that there was no nobler vehicle to give expression to thought than nervous, simple prose—that prose which he himself cultivated to so true a pitch of art.

'Tennyson,' he alleged, 'is more pretty than potent.'

We went together to see 'The Cup' at the Lyceum. He remained ominously silent during the entire performance. When the play was over I inquired: 'What do you think of it?'

'H'm! Perhaps it might have proved an interesting spectacle,' he growled, 'if the words had been left out!'

'Browning is a man of genius, but he gives me too much trouble to understand.'

'Yes! your friend Buchanan is a poet, but I like his prose best. 'Balder,' I admit, is beautiful, but 'The Shadow of the Sword' is poetry itself.'

'Edwin Arnold has sparks of the divine afflatus, and holds his own among the best.'

'Swinburne has a heart of gold, a muse of fire—a little too fiery, perhaps; but I was young once myself, and I, too, loved, and still love, the great god Pan!'

He always harked back to Byron, Shelley, and Scott. The last, however, was his greatest favourite, and he would recite by heart, with fervour, long passages, almost cantos, of 'Marmion' and 'The Lady of the Lake.'

He sometimes complained bitterly of what he called 'the Shakespearean craze,' stoutly maintaining that the people who talked most of the bard knew least about him. In a more genial mood he frankly admitted the supremacy of the 'celestial thief' to

all men who came before or after him. If I could only set him going about 'Othello'—the one perfect play through all the ages—he would discourse 'thunder and lightning.'

Music was his special delight, but his taste was as exacting as it was cultivated. Italian Opera, he always maintained, was, both in form and method, an emasculated and degraded school of art. Wagner was a giant, a hundred years in advance of his age, and his theory was sublime; but alas! after all, he lacked melody.

Once set him going about his fiddles—good-bye to everything else. He had at the tip of his tongue his violas, his viol de gambos, his viol d'amores, his violins, his violoncellos, his double basses, his Cremonas, his Sanctus Seraphin, his Stradivarius, his Amatis, his Guarneriuses—and I know not how many others. He could tell you when and where they were made, where they were now, what was their prime cost, and what their present value; then, with a chuckle, he would tell you he'd bought one for £20 and sold it for £120; that he had bought one for £5, now worth £500!

It was very trying to one's temper to sit beside him in a theatre, especially if we happened to be in the stalls. He would writhe under a bad performance, and not hesitate to express his opinion openly and freely about it.

'High art' in music he didn't believe in. 'What!' he would exclaim, 'call that braying with brass and torturing of catgut, music! Ah, give me music with melody.'

Painting and sculpture were either his delight or his abomination. A great work he reverenced, nay, adored; small things tortured him.

His appreciation of the 'younger of the sister arts' was but too frequently affected by the public estimate; hence the idol of to-day was the idiot of to-morrow, or *vice versâ*. A lady would be a 'goddess' in one part, a 'soulless lump of clay' in the other. An actor was to-day

eulogised as a genius, to-morrow stigmatised as a 'duffer.'

A few years ago we went together to see a comedy acted at a West End theatre. At the end of the fourth act he rushed out in disgust. Next day he was rampant about 'this idiotic exhibition.' He was especially furious in his diatribes against a gentleman who formerly had been his beau-ideal of all that was gallant and chivalrous. I took exception to this wholesale slaughtering, and reminded him of his former eulogies upon the man whom he now 'slated' so unmercifully.

'I know, I know!' he exclaimed. 'I was ass enough during a temporary aberration of intellect to admit he was an actor, but then I hadn't seen the beast in ——. Call that epicene creature with the parrot's nose and the peacock's voice—that feather-bed tied in the middle, supported in a perpendicular position by two bolsters, masses of wool and wadding, that he calls legs—call that Punch-like thing the genial, jovial, manly ——? No; no!—

> 'These things must not be thought
> After these ways: so, it will make us mad.'

He was not quite just to the present generation of actors, and I should only scatter heartburnings were I to quote his opinions, which, indeed, varied from day to day, from hour to hour. He was himself too apt, in connection with this subject, to 'wreathe dead men's bones about living men's necks.'

The two great artists whom he incessantly cited as being 'the choice and master spirits of the stage' were Macready and Farren the Elder. In his estimation, no living actors were fit to be named in the same century with them. After them came Mrs Glover, who was comedy incarnate. Mrs Kean, however, was only a 'matronly and respectable actress'; Mrs Warner 'a passable' Lady Macbeth; Charles Kean was a 'magnificent stage-manager, but a mediocre actor'; Phelps was 'a great

comedian, but an indifferent tragedian'; Charles Mathews, *un petit maître*; Sothern, 'an intellectual absurdity.' "Bucky" was 'funny,' Keeley was 'sleepy,' Compton was 'funereal,' Webster was 'spasmodic and perpetually imperfect,' and so on to the end.

Among our neighbours he admitted that Rachel and Lemaitre were geniuses; but he could not endure Fechter. One night during the latter's management of the Lyceum we went to see 'The Master of Ravenswood.' During the contract scene Edgar became very angry with Lucy, and, in approaching her, gesticulated so violently that for a moment it seemed as if he were about to strike her. Reade growled: 'He'll hit her in the eye in a minute, I know he will! Ah! it's always the way with those d—d Frenchmen where women are concerned—when they are not sneaks they are bullies!'

The teacup-and-saucer comedy, with the semi-chambermaid heroine and the *petit crevé* hero thereof he despised utterly. 'Give me,' he would exclaim, 'a man—one of Queen Elizabeth's men; a woman—none of your skin-and-bone abominations, but a real live woman, made as God made their mother in the Garden of Eden, with a heart in her body, limbs, and plenty of 'em; limbs, she knows how to use, 'hair of what colour it shall please heaven,' a voice that I can hear—a voice that fires me like a trumpet or melts me like a flute: that god-like instrument makes more music for me than all the fiddles that ever squeaked since the time that Nero fiddled when Rome was afire; not that I would disparage a fiddle, mind you, for next to the Queen of Hearts I adore the King of Instruments.'

Among his brother-dramatists he yielded Boucicault the first place. 'Like Shakespeare and Molière,' he said, 'the beggar steals everything he can lay his hands on; but he does it so deftly, so cleverly, that I can't help condoning the theft. He picks up a pebble by the shore and polishes it into a jewel. Occasionally, too, he writes divine lines, and

knows more about the grammar of the stage than all the rest of them put together.'

Planché was 'the modern Aristophanes. His every line glitters with Attic salt, classic grace, culture, and refinement.'

Wills was 'a splendid poet, but only a passable play-wright.'

'Hermann Merivale's fantasy, 'The White Pilgrim,' is the most poetic play of the period, but it reads better than it acts—a fatal fault. When he has mastered the art of construction and learned the use of the pruning-knife this poet ought to become a play-wright.'

'Albery has written one play so good that I can't understand why he has not written others better.'

'Burnand, if 'imitation be the sincerest flattery,' is the greatest flatterer in the world. A mimetic phenomenon. A literary freelance, who can write without any ridiculous scruples on any subject, and on any side, with equal facility.'

'Palgrave Simpson? dear old Pal's lines are written in water, but his plots are engraved in steel.'

'Scribe? the cleverest constructor of plots that ever contrived one.'

'Victorien Sardou? a dramatic genius, and as good a stage-manager as you are, sir!'

'Dumas fils? a vinegar-blooded iconoclast—shrewd, clever, audacious, introspective, and mathematically logical.'

Henry Byron's fertility and fecundity excited the elder dramatist's astonishment more than his admiration. I maintained that Byron wrote admirable lines. Reade admitted that, but alleged that he could not construct a plot. Of 'Our Boys' he remarked: 'It is an amusing farce, but the only human character in it (old Middlewick) is Lord Duberly, in coat and trousers, transmogrified into a cockney chandler.'

He was scarcely just to the author of 'Caste,'

alleging that he had palmed off Benedick and Augier's work ('School and Home') for original composition; that his men were mannikins, his women (except the comic ones) clothes-props; that his method was small, his comedies charades. Occasionally I took up the cudgels on the opposite side, but the argument always ended when we arrived at the last act of 'Caste.' That unfortunate baby of George D'Alroy's always stuck in the throat of the author of 'The Double Marriage.' 'Zounds!' he roared, 'the brutes yelled at my poor bairn, but I believe the idiots would have encored that horse-marine caricature of Rawdon Crawley if he had given the little beast the pap-bottle, *coram populo*!'

When he grew tired of talking we sometimes played a game of whist: in which he took dummy, and always beat us.

Apropos of cards, one evening, after an early dinner at the club, strolling homeward down Piccadilly, we turned into the Egyptian Hall to see Maskelyne and Cook's entertainment. The room was very full, but the officials, who knew us, brought us two chairs in front. Reade became very much interested in a remarkable mechanical figure which played at cards and won every game. After observing it for some time, he was convinced that he had discovered the trick of it. I had little difficulty in persuading him to mount the platform and try his skill against Psycho. To his astonishment, he was beaten easily, almost ignominiously.

'Well,' he said, as we came away, 'that's extraordinary! I never found a man who could lick me game and game; yet I've been knocked out of time three games running by a beastly automaton!'

Like 'women and dogs and the lower animals,' he was instinctively pronounced in his likes and dislikes, so much so that his conduct was occasionally most embarrassing to other people; indeed, at times he was an *enfant terrible* of gigantic dimensions.

Here is an illustration:

Upon one occasion, while staying with us, I asked him to take a certain distinguished actress into dinner.

Giving me a baleful glare he marched off with the lady; but all through dinner he retired upon the impregnable citadel of a diplomatic deafness, and spake no word, good, bad, or indifferent.

When our guests had departed, he opened fire with: 'What the deuce did you mean by planting on to me that Gorgon with the head of a seal and the voice of a horse?'

Au contraire, he could be the most amiable of hosts, the most genial of gentlemen. When in the mood no one played Amphitryon with a more courtly grace or a more cordial welcome.

Of many pleasant evenings at Albert Gate, I remember one or two with more than usual pleasure, especially one where we had merely a *partie carrée*—our host and hostess, Edwin James, the once eminent barrister, then recently returned from America, and myself. The brilliant career of this unfortunate gentleman, and its disastrous termination, will be fresh in most men's minds. On his return, after an absence of some years, he was left in the cold by all his old friends and associates save Reade, who stood manfully by him. I was particularly interested in the record of this blighted life. The name of Buonaparte had always been hateful to me since the *coup d'état*, and I had a vivid recollection of James's magnificent defence of Dr Bernard. Nor was this all: I was cognisant of many generous acts done by Mr James in his days of prosperity, especially one, which occurred within my own knowledge, had always impressed me strongly. One day he found on the brink of the Serpentine a beautiful young girl, who had been driven from her home by the barbarity of brutal relatives. The wretched child contemplated suicide. Her demeanour attracted his attention. He spoke to her, induced her to confide her unhappy story to him, found her an asylum, fed, clothed, educated her, and enabled

her to go on the Stage, where she achieved a distinguished position. To her dying day that lady revered the memory of her benefactor.

He and Reade had been schoolfellows together. Master Edwin had always been the "bad boy," and he recounted with great glee how he had induced Charles to play truant with him to go to a Prize-fight, and how they both caught "Toko" when they went back. It was pleasant to hear the veterans "act their young encounters o'er again."

It was said that Dickens built his strident legal bully (for whom poor Sidney Carton plays lion's provider) in "A Tale of Two Cities" on Edwin James, and that the great novelist prided himself on the fidelity of the portrait. I, at least, detected no single trait of resemblance between the learned serjeant and the genial gentleman whose acquaintance I was delighted to make on the occasion of this pleasant meeting.

Reade delighted in the company of actors, and gave me *carte blanche* to invite my comrades.

He had never met either Phelps or Fechter, who were both confreres of mine, and begged me to invite them to Albert Gate.

Unfortunately there was a little difficulty. Phelps, as the reader will doubtless remember, as the successor of Macready and the rival of Charles Kean, for a considerable period occupied one of the foremost places on the English stage.

Fechter, who was a very remarkable man, had made his mark no less by his ability than by his originality.

His performance of Ruy Blas had been much admired at the Princess's, though it had failed to attract.

His Hamlet, despite its eccentricity, had many fine points: his Othello many bad ones. In the one part he went up like a rocket, in the other he came down like a stick.

Many of the young lions of the Press, however,

Photo by J. E. Mayall, London]

PHELPS AS WOLSEY

Photo by J. & C. Watkins, London]

FECHTER AS HAMLET

beslavered with fulsome eulogy whatever he did, while they depreciated Phelps and the rising generation of English actors.

Noting this, Fechter, who was a *bon camarade*, said to me, with a grin: 'Bah! They do that to butter me up and to rile you chaps. They imagine I am a real Johnny Crapaud! Ah! if they only knew I am a Hungarian Italian Cockney Jew, born in Hanway Street, Oxford Street, they'd drop me like a hot potato!'

When he had a row (his engagements always ended in a row!) with Augustus Harris the Elder he migrated to the Lyceum under the auspices of Charles Dickens, who was a great admirer of his.

It was currently rumoured at the time that the 'Baroness' financed him, but I am assured by my friend John Hollingshead, who was in the confidence of both Fechter and Dickens, that it was the latter who found the 'needful' to put Fechter into the Lyceum.

Upon Dickens' advice he endeavoured to surround himself with the best English actors attainable. He succeeded in inducing Phelps to enlist under his banner, and, as before, stated offered me an engagement. He secured George Vining, George Jordan, Hermann Vezin, Ryder, Sam Emery, Harry Widdicombe, John Brougham, and Walter Montgomery, while his ladies comprised Carlotta Leclerq, Kate Terry, Miss Henrade, and Miss Elsworthy.

Immediately previous to his opening, Sardou's first drama, 'Le Bossu,' founded upon a novel of Paul Feval, had made a great sensation in Paris, Thither went Fechter, accompanied by John Brougham, who acquired the piece, and anglicised it under the title of 'The Duke's Motto.'

There was nothing in it for either Phelps or Montgomery, but Fechter distinguished himself so highly as the hero that the play (which was admirably acted and beautifully mounted) took the town by storm, and was played for the entire season.

Result: rows—rows, and nothing but rows!

Row No. 1. Vining left at a moment's notice, and migrated to St James's.

Row No. 2. Walter Montgomery followed suit.

Row No. 3. At the end of the season Fechter decided to do "Hamlet" for a few nights and despatched his trusty emissary Mr Humphrey Barnett to ask Phelps, the acknowledged head of the English stage, to do the Ghost on that occasion!

Those who remember Samuel can guess the reception accorded to that modest request: suffice it, that Mr Barnett quitted Phelps' house much quicker than he entered it, and was really thankful to escape with a whole skin.

Result: loggerheads and a lawsuit, which ultimately ended in a compromise, but left little love between the litigants.

However, as they were both intimate personal friends of mine, I succeeded in persuading them to meet for the purpose of "burying the hatchet and smoking the pipe of peace."

When they met Phelps was grim and growling and Fechter nervous and embarrassed, but 'Geria' knew Phelps. In their *juvenalia* he had been her Romeo at Margate and Worthing. Reade and I made Fechter at home, and before the dinner was half over the belligerents thawed, and by the time they got to their cigars (which Reade, despite his detestation of tobacco, stood like a lamb!) they were sworn friends. Their experiences were rare and unique; and Reade drew them out with wonderful facility, for upon occasion he could be as good a listener as a talker. Altogether this was a delightful evening. When we broke up Fechter confided to our host: 'Ah, M. Reade, he is a grand old man, and I loafe him like a brother, but *entre nous*, he cannot play Hamlet!'

On the other hand, as he got into his cab, Phelps grunted: 'After all, John, he's not a bad sort of chap for a—a—Frenchman, but by—! he can't play Shakespeare!'

Boucicault came to dine with us the following Sunday, and was in his most genial mood, bubbling over with anecdotal vivacity.

Speaking of the success of 'Arrah na Pogue,' he said: 'All's well that ends well,' but, be jabers! poor 'Arrah' had a near squeak for her life in Dublin. I'd devised a kind of Irish Meg Merrilees for Sam Emery which nearly cooked the piece and sent it to blazes. Then there was a little comedy part for Sam Johnson which was no use and it had to go too. In fact I had to put the back where the belly was, and the belly on the back, and turn the whole thing inside out. But I saw the strength as well as the weakness: I've nailed the one and knifed the other.

Even then the play wouldn't have been what it is if it hadn't been for Vining. When I read it to him, he said, 'Right as rain!—save that it wants a fillip to the last act. By Jove!' he burst out, 'I've got it!—got it in the Theatre too! Do you remember that wretched "Golden Daggers" thing that Ned Yates did for Harris and Fechter? Well, we've got the three sinking bridges (cost five or six hundred pounds and only used for a week) here!—here under our feet! I'll go and see Lloyd this moment and arrange to work 'em into your escape. This effect, and a song for Arrah, and there you are, my boy!'

'And there you were!—*all* there!—delightful, admirable, perfect!' I interjected.

'That's very kind of you, dear boy! But, of course, I needn't tell you no actor can be a comedian until he's been a tragedian. You should see my Hamlet. The part has never been played yet—and never will be, till I play it. Then, as to Shylock—talk about 'the Jew that Shakespeare drew'—wait till you see mine!'

'Billy Farren was of your way of thinking, Dion,' interjected 'Geria.' 'One night at the Haymarket I was saying something civil about Grandfather Whitehead. 'Grandfather Whitehead!' he

roared. 'Rot! Lear is *my* part—but that ass of a Webster don't see it. Talks about Macready—to me!—to me!—William Farren! Of course "Mac" is a passable melodramatic actor, but Lear should be a king—and, beged! I am a king, and no mistake!'

'Alfred Wigan,' said I, chiming in, 'was equally modest. When I first met him, at Bath and Bristol, he blandly remarked: "Your Shylock and Hamlet are both wrong, hopelessly wrong! You make Shylock too old, and really too atrociously bloodthirsty for anything in human nature; while as for your Hamlet, he is too colloquial—too young! Hamlet is a man, not a boy. You make him too like Romeo in the tragic parts, and too like Mercutio in the lighter moods. You lack ballast, sir, ballast!'

'Better lack ballast than brains!' snapped Boucicault. 'Bah! The infernal flunkeyism of that tuft-hunting bounder and his precious "Leonora" with her "dear Duchess" and "our darling little Queen" always puts my back up. Of course he's all right in his Frenchmen and his niminy-piminy half-begotten walking gentlemen, but when it comes to Shakespeare—Bosh! What do you think the beggar had the cheek to say to me during the rehearsal of "The Corsican Brothers"? "Dion," said he, "don't you think there is a fine opening for a tragedian now that "Mac" has retired?"'

'How about Kean and Phelps?' I inquired.

'Oh, they're mere agricultural nobodies. No, sir; the hour has come and awaits the man, and I—yes, I—ahem! flatter myself that my Shylock will open the eyes of——'

'Shut up, you are an idiot! said I; and that ended the conversation.'

'But not his aspirations,' I replied, 'for he *did* try his hand at Shylock in Liverpool the other day. Evidently it opened *his* eyes, for he hasn't repeated the experiment.'

'None of you, though,' interposed Reade, 'are

'in it' with Charley Mathews, who solemnly assured me the ambition of his life was to play Iago, Mephisto and Chateau Renaud.'

'And very well he'd have done 'em,' remarked Boucicault. 'At one time when Kayne—I mayne Kean—was about to throw me over, we were within measurable distance of doing 'The Corsicans' at the Lyceum with Charley for Chateau Renaud and myself for the Twins.'

'In the burlesque, Dion?' inquired 'Geria,' demurely.

'No, madam, in mine!'

'What! *your* burlesque?'

'No, no; of course not! In the raal thing—I mayne the real thing. The novelty—the ghost——the melody—the masquerade—the fight. We are both splendid swordsmen; and he's not half a bad actor in sayrious, I mayne serious, business. Ever seen him, John, in 'The Chain of Events,' 'Returned from Portland' or 'Black Sheep'?'

'In all. I've seen him in 'The Day of Reckoning' too.'

'At the Lyceum?'

'No; at Manchester, where they guyed him off the stage.'

'The dirty bla'guards!'

'I went round to condole with him. 'Ha, ha!' laughed he, 'you tragedy Jacks always take things seriously. You don't understand the meaning of this sibillation: it's merely a tribute to genius! Wait till you see my Iago. Come and play Othello for my benefit. I'll bet they'll be packed like herrings in a barrel, and the pit will rise at us and pelt us——'

'With flowers?'

'No; brickbats, dear boy!'

. . . . . .

Next day I called at Portland Place to present Boucicault with a miniature I had picked up, at a curiosity shop in Harrogate, of his God-father, Dionysius Lardner, remembered now chiefly through

Thackeray's atrocious caricature in 'The Yellowplush Papers' (and a notorious divorce case in which he figured as a gay Lothario), but who was, notwithstanding, editor of the *Encyclopedia*, and a man of conspicuous ability.

'I suppose you thought I was 'codding' you last night when I talked of playing Shylock?' said Dion.

'Oh dear, no! I can quite understand the mortification of a man of your mark being condemned everlastingly to make the groundlings laugh.'

'That's just it! I am raally—I mayne really—a tragedian, condemned by hard fate to grin through a horse collar, and to pick up tricks from forgotten pantomimes. Now, look here!'—and he showed me a model of a splendid dramatic effect which he had designed for an American drama entitled "Belle Lamar,' founded upon the Civil War, and afterwards produced in New York.

By touching a spring at the moment of an explosion the scene tumbled to pieces, discovering an animated tableau of a battlefield, cavalry, infantry, artillery, banners, etc.

'That's the end of the third act: ever see anything like that before?' he inquired.

'Never!'

'Well, it is a trick—merely a single trick designed by Clarkson Stanfield for the comic business of one of Macready's Pantomimes. You know more than most of 'em, but see what an infant you are! You boys of to-day who didn't see Mac's productions have no idea what you lost. That is why I—I who saw them all—should like to try my hand on one or two of the great parts to show how they ought to be done. If I live long enough I'll have a shy at Louis the Eleventh. I will, by Jove! Such a part! Ever see it?'

'Yes; I saw Ligier in Paris, and Charles Kean's first night here.'

'I was in Paris at the time of its first production. Charley and Ben Webster used to go night after night and glare at each other. They were neither of them

very pious, but, 'pon my sowl!—soul I mayne—I b'lieve aich prayed every night that the other might be dhrowned on the way home, that the survivor might have the first shy at Louis in London. Oh, yes; Kayne—I mayne Kean—is right enough, but wait till you see *me!*'

I never had that good fortune; but 'Boucy' remained steadfast to his purpose, and, years afterwards, actually did play Louis in New York, assisted by his son-in-law John Clayton as Nemours; and his son Dion as the Dauphin. I feel assured the performance must have been an excellent one, but the pecuniary result was not equal to its deserts.

Soon afterwards Dion 'moved over,' emitting from his deathbed a Parthian dart in the bitter apothegm: "The world is a barbarous monster and forgets!'

If the world has really forgotten the hours of unmixed delight and delicious emotion it owes to the most accomplished dramatist, and most brilliant Irish comedian of his epoch, then it is a barbarous monster indeed. But that is scarce likely, so long as a family of brilliant comedians remains to remind it that the author of "Arrah na Pogue" is also the author of Nina, of Eve, of Dion, and of Aubrey Boucicault.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW CUT

Mortified at the Failure of "Dora" and the "Double Marriage" Reade resolves to "quit the loathed Stage," but claims the Privilege to change his Mind and seriously contemplates building a Theatre in Sloane Street, or buying one in Holborn —He breaks an Appointment, and writes a characteristic Letter—Arthur Reade describes "Uncle Charles's Exploits at Ipsden—Egeria and the Writer pay a Visit to the Surrey and to the Victoria — An Adventure at the Vick — The classic Drama of "Sweeny Todd"—A Play within a Play—Romeo and Juliet—Turn out the Lights and drop the Curtain

DISAPPOINTED and mortified by the failure of "Dora" and "A Double Marriage," Reade turned his back for the second time upon his beloved hobby, and devoted himself entirely to fiction.

The stage, however, has a fatal fascination for its votaries. Hence, after a few weeks' spell at the bench, he summoned me to town on important business in which we were mutually interested—no less than the building a theatre in Knightsbridge, or purchasing one already existent in Holborn.

Upon arriving at the Tavistock at four o'clock one summer morning seven-and-twenty years ago, I found the following characteristic note:—

'Sorry I can't meet you to-morrow as promised. A sprightly young American has just swooped down on me with an introduction from my old friend Field of Boston.

Though only two-and-twenty and pretty as a picture she is alone and unattended. On Thursday

she starts for Paris. She proposes to 'do' the Ville Luminiere in three days, then off to Switzerland, thence up the Rhine, taking a smell at St Mark's and the Venetian Canals *en route*, and finishing with the Eternal City in a fortnight.

What a blessing is the light-heartedness of youth! Were I half-a-century younger I would escort her myself; but, alas!

> 'Age with his stealing steps
> Hath clawed me in his clutch!'

and—well—my fair young friend knows her way about, and she has extorted from me a promise to take her to Oxford to-morrow, and show her the lions, such as they are.

'The proper study of mankind is man'—no, woman, I mean—and as I am sure she will prove an interesting study, I shall have to devote at least a couple of days to the young hussy.

When I have diagnosed her, and packed her off to Paris, I must move on to Wallingford; where brother Ned who, I think I told you, has taken Ipsden from brother Bill and has—I'm getting mixed here—Who has—Bill or Ned? Why, Ned, to be sure.

Well, you know—no, you don't!—you players 'never know nuffen,' except your blessed bard who—although he was a player—knew everything on the face of God's earth, and a lot of things that are not on it, nor of it.

Well, of course, sweet Will knew that the shooting always begins in September—I suppose they used bows and arrows and matchlocks in those days. Whatever they used, you may take your oath he knew all about it—for was he not a poacher—the prince of poachers? Now I dearly love a poacher—

> 'For it's my delight on a shiny night,
> In the season of the year,
> The season of the year, my boy!'

and, *entre nous*, one of my reasons for going to

Wallingford is to foregather with our own particular poacher, Slaughter. Dear old Jack! The Squire used to send him to 'do time' occasionally, but he——(I'm getting more mixed than ever. Oh, confound grammar! It was only made for fools.) Grammar or no grammar, Jack doesn't bear malice, for he's a right-down good fella, and is always glad to see 'Massa Charles.'

'Let me endeavour to be coherent.

'Ned has invited me to have a shy at the birds. I shall be away for a week or ten days, and shall be glad if you can stay till my return. The rest will do you good, for you are a glutton at work, and are working too hard. Remember you can't burn the candle at both ends, or if you do, it's sure to go out in the middle!

'Of course if you can't stay I shall have to come down to you when I get back.

'But you will, you must, stay, for the Duchess is all alone, and counts on you to keep her company while I am away. So cut your caravanserai (is it ai or y?) and send your traps down after breakfast to Albert Gate.

'Dinner will be ready at eight, which will leave you a long day for your 'gels,' your swells, and your idiotic brother-managers. Bah! how I hate the brainless brutes! Vining and you are the only decent chaps of the whole gang.

'Wire Laura, that she may expect you, and prepare accordingly.

'How you two will 'meg'! what yarns you will spin, and what reams of copy will be lost to the world, and to yours ever, C. R.

'By-the-by, you must spare a night to go to the Surrey. There is a nondescript thing yclept a burlesque there, with a lot of rough-and-tumble honest fun, some bright music, and two or three good voices. There are also three princes, boys—'gels' I mean. No; not 'gels'—goddesses! Such faces! such figures!—such—such——! Then there's a 'gel,'

a real gel, with arms bared to the shoulder, 'such arms, Jack'—such—but go and judge for yourself.

'Apropos you ought also to go to the 'Vick' while you are in the neighbourhood. There are two gels there worth seeing: one, a fat little lump of a thing, named Lydia Foote, with eyes like lodestars and the voice of a nightingale; the other, a sprightly young imp, wild as an unbroken colt, said to be a daughter of Harry Farren.

'Better take Laura with you to keep you out of mischief!'

What became of that sprightly young party from Boston I never heard; but my friend Arthur Reade, has been kind enough to furnish me with an account of Uncle Charles's doings at Ipsden, at or about that time.

Arthur Reade *loquitur*

'My uncle's old friend and mine, John Coleman, has asked me to supplement his recollections of my Uncle Charles, by some personal experience of his visits to Ipsden; and I do so with pleasure. My first recollection of uncle was his joining the family party at St Alban's House, Regency Square in 1856, when my father (Edward Anderton Reade, C.B., acting Lieutenant-Governor of the N.W.P., and the first man to enter the town of Agra during the Mutiny in 1857), after twenty-eight years' service in India, came home on six months' furlough, bringing my mother and my three younger sisters with him.

Uncle Charles, who was fond of bathing and a fine swimmer, was anxious his nephew should acquire that manly accomplishment, and used to take me on his back into deep water, and then let me shift for myself. He frequently took us to the Theatre, and in his care I saw my first pantomime at Brighton, which was based on the story of Lord Lovel; the part of the amorous hero being enacted by Mr Fred.

Dewar, who afterwards became so well known as Captain Crostree in Burnand's famous burlesque of 'Black-ey'd Susan' at the Royalty.

When my father retired from the service he rented the family estate at Ipsden from his elder brother William, and when the shooting came round Uncle Charles paid his annual visit, and was always a welcome guest.

He was very fond of children, and we were very fond of him. After dinner we invariably dragged him to the piano and made him sing to us "Lashed to the Helm," and "How shall I get married?" two songs I have never heard anyone else sing, nor have I met anyone who ever did. They were sentimental; but "The Great Mogul" was his comic effort, and was always embellished with a little dramatic effect.

We sometimes intruded on him in order to see his 'illumination,' as he termed it. He wrote with from eight to twelve candles ranged round the table in a semi-circle. These candles and the candlesticks, which were 'short and fat,' and made of wire, he always brought with him.

I don't remember his ever using a harsh expression, but when he wanted to get rid of us he used to look round sternly, then we knew we were not wanted, and cleared out.

He was fond of sport, but was a sportsman of the old-fashioned kind, and very nervous. So much so, that a brother of mine, who had a tendency to excitability and was apt to flourish his gun about, had to retire to a distant part of the field when uncle was bent on a day's sport. He was a capital shot; and his stories of the days when he traversed the fields of Ipsden as a boy were very interesting. But as he walked over them in our time he was prone to fall into a reverie occasionally; and more than once I have seen the birds get up close to him without his noticing them, and the keeper would have to shout 'mark' in extra high tone to attract his attention.

One day the spring of his powder-flask was broken (it was in the days of muzzle-loaders), and so he reverted to a practice of his boyhood—namely, of carrying powder loose in one pocket, and shot loose in the other, and loading with a clay pipe!

On wet days his favourite game was battledore and shuttlecock in the entrance-hall. He was a first-rate croquet player, and on non-shooting days devoted himself to giving the youngsters of the family a lesson in the game.

My father converted one of the meadows at Ipsden into a cricket ground.

On one occasion the village club was one short, and we pressed Uncle Charles into the service.

Everyone remembers his cloth boots with kid tips and his baggy pantaloons. Well, he wore them on this occasion, and a remarkable and grotesque figure he looked when he took off his coat and went to wicket. He went in last and was out in twelve runs, the Ipsden Club winning with a few runs to spare. My father went to congratulate him, whereupon he said in a solemn way: "I am still 'not out.' Twenty years ago I made fifty-two and was 'not out' for Maudlen!"

When fixed in town I was frequently invited to Albert Gate, and many a pleasant hour I passed there—that is, when he was disposed to be communicative. At times, however, his eccentricity and taciturnity were remarkable. On one occasion I happened to repeat the hackneyed aphorism that 'Truth is stranger than fiction.' 'Bosh!' he blazed out. 'A ridiculous fallacy! Can you recount one single incident in real life which has not been anticipated by fiction?'

'Yes; I can,' I replied. 'I have seen with my own eyes a railway train wrecked by a collision with an elephant which at the same moment was wrecked and killed by the train! Show me anything like that in fiction!'

'I can't,' he growled, 'so count two—one to you and another to your blessed elephant!'

I have alluded to his taste for music. He was fond of the divine art, but only that of the old masters. Handel he placed on a pedestal over and above every other musician. One day our conversation had for its subject the capacity of women, and I asked him to come and hear Madame Neruda. He required a deal of persuasion but ultimately came, thanks to an invitation from our dear old friend Arthur Chappell. Madame Neruda and her three famous coadjutors, Mesdames Ries, Zerlini, and Piatti played one of Mendelssohn's quartettes. Uncle was attracted by the lovely slow movement, but the beauties of the other movements didn't impress him in the slightest degree. After the concert was over he simply said: "I should like to have heard them play 'The March of the Men of Harlech.'

I suppose that was the first and last time he ever attended a 'Monday Pop.'

One evening, however, I met him in the street, and he carried me off there and then to a music hall at Knightsbridge! He appeared to thoroughly enjoy some of the "turns," especially one given by a female vocalist, upon whose graceful action and undoubtedly good voice he waxed quite eloquent. I left him more than ever fully persuaded that genius is always tinged with eccentricity. Yet how kind a heart he had! The first winter I was in England I was laid up with bronchitis. He called frequently, and used to bring me all sorts of delicacies. When I got better I tried to thank him; he replied: 'Don't talk nonsense, but play me a bit of Handel, my boy.'

As soon as I was able to get out I called on him, and found him with a pile of manuscript before him and a large open Bible on the desk. He was then preparing his letters on ambidexterity. 'Can you tell me,' said he, "any one of your acquaintance who could use his left hand as well as his right?"

In reply I mentioned the famous cricketer, Mr Sam

Linton, of Christchurch, Oxford, who came down to my old school, Haileybury, with the Free Foresters, to play a cricket-match, and much surprised us boys by the facility with which he returned the balls from his position at long-leg with either his left or right arm, according to the side it came from. For the rest of the season it was the fashion at Haileybury to practise ambidexterity.

Many persons will doubtless remember Uncle Charles's remarkable letters to the *Daily Telegraph* on the Staunton case, and how, avoiding the moral aspect of the affair, he took up the legal position which resulted in a reprieve to the wretched prisoners. Well, I happened to meet him on the very day the decision of the Home Secretary was announced, and remarked that Alice Rhodes had been reprieved. 'Reprieved!' he retorted, somewhat angrily, 'they ought to have gone down on their knees and begged her pardon.'

Despite his prejudice against being photographed I induced him to face the camera. I took him to Lombardi's in Pall Mall (since dead) to see some new method of reproducing pictures in colour by means of photography, and very remarkable were the results. The photographer was anxious to secure the likeness of such a celebrity, and after some demur he consented to sit, provided that while the operation was taking place I would sing one of his favourite songs, "Waft her, Angels." I agreed, and an admirable picture was the result!'*

Acting on Reade's hint, "Geria" and I resolved to devote a night to the Surrey and the 'Vick,' taking the first piece at one, and the last at the other, thus killing two birds with one stone!

The piece at the Surrey was all the Doctor had described—but the acting? oh dear—oh dear!

'Well, what do you think of the Doctor's goddesses?' inquired Geria, as we left.

'Fine animals.'

* For result see Frontispiece.

'Yes! his tastes lie in that direction,' she replied, with the slightest tinge of asperity.

As we strolled down towards the New Cut, she continued: 'The Surrey was quite a fashionable place when I was a girl. I remember my sister Carrie and I fighting our way into the pit to see T. P. Cooke play William in 'Black-eye'd Susan,' which was acted for an entire season.'

'Who was the manager then?'

'Elliston.'

'What!—the renowned Robert William?'

'Yes; Father knew him very well, and I remember hearing him say that Elliston told him that after he was banished from Drury Lane he took the Surrey, opened it, and carried everything before him on a capital of half-a-crown, which he borrowed from Alfred Wigan's father!'

By this time we had reached the 'Vick.'

As we were about to enter, five or six youthful Hooligan Aristocrats were smoking cutty pipes and evil-smelling cigars, and cracking salacious jokes in the dimly-lighted, dingy vestibule.

With a movement of disgust Geria turned back, and said:

'Call me a cab. I'm going home.'

'Nay, then, I'll go with you.'

'But I thought you wanted to see those girls.'

'I can see them any night—but I can't see you home every night—so come along.'

'Ah! it's aisy seeing you're Irish, ye villyan, so it is! Oh, well! have your own way, Misther Brian Boroo! Allons! then, for the slaughter-house!'

So saying, she led the way, and two minutes later we were ensconced in a private box, which looked as if it had not been swept for a month, while the curtains apparently had not been washed for a year.

Then the chairs! There were four cane-bottomed ones, with long legs and high seats. One of them was supposed to be an arm-chair, because it had apologies for arms, while the others had merely backs—such backs!

'How can I ever mount up there?' inquired Geria, ruefully.

'I'll help you,' and I lifted her up.

'Oh dear! oh deary me! now that I *am* here where am I to put my poor little legs?'

'I'll show you,' and I turned one of the chairs down horizontally so as to form a footstool.

'Thanks! Good gracious, what a house. The creatures are packed like herrings, and oh!—odoriferous Arabia! 'An ounce of civet, good apothecary!' P-r-r!'

When the band struck up the *en'tracte* we referred to the programme, and found the girls we came to see were conspicuous by their absence, and the *piece de resistance* was the famous classic drama, 'Sweeny Todd, The Barber Fiend of Fleet Street'!

The band ceased, and a hush of expectancy ensued. One of the young Aristocrats whom we had noted in the vestibule—and who now sat immediately beneath us in the stalls complacently puffing his penny Pickwick—confided to a chum: 'Sweeny's in fine form to-night! I see 'im just now wis 'is cargo aboard, a-goin' for stage-door like a bull at a gate. He's got the Jumps! No bloomin' fake this time, laddy, but real Jim-Jams as 'ot as they make 'em. He'll polish the lot of 'em off like old boots, you bet.'

At this moment up went the curtain, discovering Mr Sweeny Todd's mammoth shaving-saloon. For a moment the stage remained vacant, and angry voices were heard in altercation without. Then a man of six feet entered from the door in flat, followed by a woman nearly as tall as himself. As they came down the stage the house rose at them, the men roaring 'Go for the beggar, Poll, go for him!' the women responding 'Let the cat have it, Bob!'

'Bob!' gasped 'Geria' as she recoiled into the corner of the box, behind the curtain.

'What's the matter?' I inquired.

"Oh, nothing; I've got a touch of cramp, that's all. Don't mind me."

Meanwhile the stars bowed their acknowledgments to their admirers, and resumed their wrangle. They were really an interesting couple this Mr and Mrs Robert Heritage.

The man was slenderly but elegantly formed. His figure might have been that of a youth of five-and-twenty, but the lines upon his careworn but expressive countenance told another tale. He would never see sixty again. His eyes were coals of fire; his flexible and beautiful hands were almost transparent in their attenuation.

The woman's ample and majestic form contrasted strongly with the man's fragility.

As they glared upon each other her beautiful eyes seemed to catch fire from his scorching glances.

Nothing but the terrible earnestness of this incongruous couple could have held together the awful rot they were condemned to speak.

I gathered from this delectable stuff that they were respectively Mr Sweeny Todd, proprietor of Todd's famous penny shaving-saloon in Fleet Street, and Mistress Lucy Lovatt, proprietress of an equally famous pork pie-shop adjacent, in which the gentleman was a partner. As far as I could understand their animadversions, there were no "roses and raptures" or any erotic nonsense between this interesting couple. On the contrary, the business was run on strictly commercial principles, the gentleman providing the pork, the lady making the pies — the profits being equally divided between them.

Evidently a rupture had occurred in consequence of his having appropriated more than his share of the plunder, and having neglected to provide an adequate supply of pork, a failure which she attributed to sheer indolence, inasmuch as all he had to do was to cut the throat of every customer who came to be shaved, and shoot the body down a trap into the bakery below, while she conscientiously fulfilled her portion of the contract by converting the "cold corpses" into pork pies, which were in great

demand in the neighbourhood in consequence of their peculiarly delicious flavour.

The supply of pork was not commensurate with the demand for pies, hence Mrs Lovatt's ultimatum that if Todd did not "own up" she would "drag him to the Old Bailey and denounce him," and his rejoinder that she "might denounce and be ——!"

Here he paused significantly; then, producing a razor and stropping it on the palm of his hand, blandly intimated: 'Look here, my fair friend, if you give me any more of your lip I'll polish you off.'

At these words there arose a roar from the gallery, as if in recognition of an old familiar friend, and a yell of 'That's right, go for her, polish her off, Sweeny!'

At sight of the razor the lady beat a retreat, denouncing him as a cowardly cut-throat, and Mr Todd was left 'monarch of all he surveyed.'

Then commenced a soliloquy, or rather an interminable series of soliloquies, addressed to the pit, in which the soliloquiser dilated with great gusto on his prowess in the gentle art of 'polishing 'em off,' which I speedily discovered to be a New Cut 'locution for cutting a throat.

Apparently the Aristocratic youth had been accurately informed—Sweeny had got 'the Jumps,' and got them badly. Evidently this was his great scene! He blurted out the most monstrous, yet most ridiculous remarks, pausing every now and then to "polish off" some hapless wight of a super who accidentally strayed into the shaving saloon.

The process was always the same.

The visitor was politely conducted to a seat situate over the central trap, a napkin was tucked under his chin and tied to the back of the chair. His face was lathered, the brush thrust into his mouth or his eyes—this business was every now and then interpenetrated with some fine touch of weird pantomime, some subtle irony, or some tragic horror which made me laugh one moment and shudder the next—then, hey presto! slish slash went the murderous razor across the victim's throat, the trap

descended with a rush into the pie-shop, while the demon barber shrieked: 'I've polished him off!' and the sympathetic auditors roared in responsive delight: 'Good old Sweeny! More pork for Mother Lovatt! Encore, encore!'

During all this time Geria sat with eyes fixed on the demented creature, half tragedian, half clown, cutting his extraordinary antics before the seething, roaring pit.

Anything more grotesquely horrible or more tragically comical it is impossible to conceive.

I spoke to Geria once or twice, but she didn't heed me, and I scarce heeded her; for this demoniacal buffoon held me spell-bound, and I couldn't help thinking, if his amazing power of hypnotising a multitude had been put to a profitable use, what a tremendous tragedian he would have made.

Unfortunately for me, when my risible faculties are excited they are uncontrollable, and the situation was getting the better of me.

Restrain myself as much as I would, I couldn't help letting out occasionally; still more unfortunately, when I did let out, it was always in the wrong place.

Evidently Mr Todd failed to appreciate this, and at every cachinnation, however slight, he gave me a baleful glare, his irritation getting more and more pronounced on each occasion.

Matters reached their culminating point when, stropping his razor on the palm of his hand, he advanced to the footlights and gravely addressed the pit thus:

'Scum of the earth, I wish ye had—hic—all one hic—huge throat that I might—hic—polish ye off in one fell swoop!'

If my life had depended upon it I could contain myself no longer, and I emitted a peal of laughter which might have been heard in the Strand.

It was like the spark to a powder magazine!

With a leonine roar of 'Puppy, puppy!' the maniac sprang over to our box, and there he stood, erect and terrible brandishing his razor, while he

glared on me with the lurid light of madness flaming in his eyes.

Upon the instant, She — 'Geria' — leaped down between us, exclaiming: 'Robert! are you mad?'

At the sound of her voice and the sight of her face he recoiled, the razor fell from his nerveless grasp, and in a choking voice he gasped: 'I am! God help me, I am! And 'tis you who have made me so. You—oh, Juliet! cruel, barbarous Juliet!'

Forth from his mouth spouted a torrent of blood which he vainly tried to stem.

Plucking at his throat, wildly beating the air with his bloody hands, he uttered a last despairing cry of 'Juliet!' Then, with a crash which seemed to shake the building to its base, he fell senseless on the stage.

A confused murmur of voices arose before, behind, on every hand: but high above it rang out a woman's cry of agony, as Mrs Lovat (denuded of her flaming crimson sacque, and clad in one simple garment of white) rushed on, and, with a wail of anguish, snatched the prostrate body to her bosom, exclaiming: 'Robert, my darling, my darling!'

Then the curtain fell and shut them from our sight.

This was not acting, it was a terrible reality.

The gods, however, evidently regarded it as a grand *coup-de-theatre*, and they roared themselves hoarse in acclamations of delight. The young O'Hooligan below intimated to his friend: 'Didn't I tell yer he was a-goin' to knock 'em to-night? And he has knocked 'em, too, and no flies—knocked 'em into nine holes!'

At this moment Mrs Lovatt burst into our box, pale and livid. 'Oh, come!' she cried, addressing Geria. 'Come, for God's sake! He's dying—and he can't die till he sees you!'

I followed them on to the stage, but did not presume to follow to the dressing-room into which they disappeared.

The stage-manager went before the curtain. I couldn't hear what he said, but I could distinguish that there was an awful silence, amidst which the band, with a fine sympathetic instinct, struck up "The Dead March in Saul." Then came the muffled tramp of departing feet. As the sound subsided into silence, the lights were subdued, and presently the curtain was uplifted upon the ghastly deserted house.

There was no confusion anywhere: nothing but sadness and silence.

The carpenters moved about on tip-toe, noiselessly 'striking' the scene and shunting it into the 'dock.' The property-men stowed away their properties in the same sepulchral fashion; the gasmen extinguished the border, the side, and footlights, then lighting the "T" at the prompt table, left the stage in semi-darkness. Feeling, as I always do, *de trop* behind the scenes, unless actively engaged there, I still mustered courage to address the prompter.

'Nothing serious, I hope, sir?'

'I hope so, too!' he replied. 'Poor Bob! He's often taken that way when he's been dining out. He knows lots of nobs—old schoolmates at Eton, and pals at Oxford—who never think of lending him a tenner, though they don't mind standing a fiver for a dinner.'

At this moment a gentleman entered breathless from the stage-door, followed by the call-boy. 'Order a cab, my man, at once—a four-wheeler—we may want it for the hospital.'

Then, turning to the prompter, the doctor (for it was he) continued: 'Now, White, where's poor Heritage? Show me to him at once!'

Having conducted the doctor to the dressing-room opposite, the prompter returned to me.

Resuming where we left off, I inquired:

'Mr Heritage often here?'

'Oh, on and off, sir, forty years and more, ever since Abbot and Egerton's time. Used to be Abbot's understudy in Romeo. But he made his

great *coup* in Miss Mitford's 'Charles the First.' Don't know who originally played the part, but the poor chap got run over on the Bridge one night, then Heritage got his chance, and I've heard Mr Cathcart say (he was the original Oliver, and a fine actor) that Bob made up magnificently and played the part splendidly, and that, if he'd only have got to the West End then, he'd have made some of 'em 'sit up,' the other side the Bridge—but he never got there. That soured him, and spoiled him; then there was some story about a woman who 'chucked' him; anyhow he took to his 'daffy,' and it's been all down hill ever since. Poor chap! he only gets a look-in now and then in this piece which he hates—for he's a gentleman (allays a gentleman!), sir; while she, poor dear, is a lady every inch of her, and she detests the beastly thing too—but they have to live, sir, and hard lines they find it, I can tell you.'

By this time the call-boy returned and knocked softly at the dressing-room door.

'Cab's ready, sir,' said he.

After a moment's pause the doctor emerged. Taking off his hat he said, 'We shall not need it now.'

Instantly every head was bared.

'All over, sir?' inquired the prompter, huskily.

'Yes; burst a blood-vessel. Happy release for the poor fellow—no pain—no trouble—passed away with a smile on his lips.'

Then the doctor whispered the prompter, who whispered the property-man and the carpenter, who whispered half-a-dozen volunteers.

They all slipped noiselessly away, returning presently with a dozen or more lighted candles, some sheets and cushions, which they took into the dressing-room.

Simultaneously the crowd at the back sank to their knees.

Thus for a minute or two, then half-a-dozen or more of the principals arose and noiselessly entered

the dressing-room, while the others stole silently away, leaving me alone on the bare, empty stage.

By-and-by Geria came out.

'Got any money?' she inquired, abruptly.

'Yes; how much do you want?'

'What have you got?'

'Two ten-pound notes.'

'Any gold?'

'Yes; three sovereigns.'

'Give me the two notes and two sovereigns. Thanks.' And she went back to the dressing-room.

Presently she returned, accompanied by a couple of ladies.

'You won't leave her, will you?' she inquired.

'Not until the end,' replied one.

'Not even then,' said the other.

'Thanks—good-night. Now take me home.'

The cab, which the call-boy had ordered, was still waiting at the door. As we drove away, I inquired: 'May I——?'

'No, you may not! Don't speak! and let me alone, if you please!'

When we reached Albert Gate she went straight up to bed, without even so much as a good-night.

I had a bad time of it myself, for had it not been for my beastly idiotic laughter——!

When I got down in the morning, Mary brought me a message, 'Mrs Seymour's compliments, has a violent headache—would I mind breakfasting alone?'

I was not in a lively mood, and had with difficulty coaxed down a cup of tea, when there came a telegram from William Brough summoning me immediately to Hull.

I had barely half-an-hour to get to King's Cross; so, scribbling a hasty note to my hostess, I jumped into a cab, and bowled down to the Great Northern just in time to catch the Express.

My business in Hull is scarce worth recounting, except for a remarkable coincidence which occurred when I got there.

I had taken the new Theatre Royal, the lease was

waiting for my signature, and William Brough, the author, who preceded me in the management, was waiting to hand over the keys and some property which I had purchased.

Business settled, we dined together at Glover's. After dinner I inquired if anything was going on in the town.

Brough replied: 'The Queen's Theatre is open, and I've promised myself a treat to-night.'

'What's that?'

'Nothing less,' he replied, 'than a performance of the immortal drama of 'Sweeny Todd.'

'No?'

'Yes! Will you come?'

'No, thanks—besides it's too late. It will be nine o'clock before we can get there.'

'That won't matter; I saw the first two acts at the Adelphi, Liverpool, a fortnight ago, and only want to see the last. It's splendid fun for my new burlesque.'

After the experience of the preceding night I had little inclination for another dose of 'Sweeny Todd,' but Brough was so pressing that I suffered myself to be persuaded.

When we got to the theatre, which I remark, *en passant*, was the longest, largest, and ugliest in England, we found the place crowded and the piece in full blast.

Fortunately it was getting towards the end. The star of the goodly company was a famous actor from the minors, who absolutely revelled in the banalities of the bestial barber.

Catching sight of us, the distinguished metropolitan performer went straight for our box. It was impossible to avoid laughter; the more we laughed the more delighted he appeared to be. He flourished his razor and chuckled, roared, yelled, and gloated over every victim he 'polished off,' but Nemesis was at hand!

Another victim was about to be immolated, when lo! just at the psychological moment, a melancholy

low comedian shunted the ruthless Sweeny into the fatal chair, jerked the ruffian's hand (with a razor in it) across his own carotid artery as he descended into the pork shop. With his last gasp the barber fiend roared, 'S'help me Bob—they've polished *me* off!'

What an inexplicable mystery is this dual brain of ours!

Although I could not refrain from laughing at this brutal buffoonery, yet at the self-same moment I saw and heard and shuddered at the pathetic horror of the night before!

'There's something in this more than natural, if philosophy could only find it out!'

CHAPTER IV

'GRIFFITH GAUNT,' 'FOUL PLAY,' AND 'PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE'

"Griffith Gaunt" is assailed by the Critics in America, and a Lawsuit ensues which results in a Verdict for Six Cents Damages—Reade and Boucicault write "Foul Play" for the *Cornhill*, receiving a larger Honorarium than had ever been paid before for an English Novel—Authors agree to differ about the Dramatisation, and each provides his own Version—Boucicault fails at the Holborn—Reade succeeds at Leeds where the Narrator produces it, and subsequently takes it on a provincial Tour—He suggests to Reade the Sheffield Trade Outrages for a Story and a Play—They go to Sheffield for Details—Extraordinary Experiences in the Production of the Play at Leeds, prior to its Production in London—"Little Coley"—"The Robust Invalid"—Last Appearance of George Vining

In 1866 Reade wrote 'Griffith Gaunt.' This work originally appeared serially in the *Argosy*, and was afterwards published in the orthodox three-volume form.

It was pirated right and left in America, and was assailed in the most virulent manner both at home and abroad. In the States the abuse went beyond the bounds of decency, especially in a publication called the *Round Table*.

Leo was not the man to take a blow without giving a thrust, and he 'went' for his detractors in a furious article entitled 'The Prurient Prude.'

Unable to get at his assailant personally he commenced proceedings against the publisher, and employed (as before stated) George Vandenhoff, the tragedian, to read the story to the jury, who awarded him damages for the munificent sum of six cents.

Even this rebuff did not induce him to lose faith in this splendid story, which he forthwith put into dramatic form, as will be shown hereafter.

The relations between himself and Boucicault had now ripened to such friendly intimacy that it occurred to them that the names of the authors of "The Colleen Bawn" and of "It is Never too Late to Mend" were names to conjure with! They therefore arranged to write a novel first, dramatise it after, and sweep both England and America with it. The novel was projected, and I believe the publishers, Smith & Elder, paid for the serial rights in *Cornhill* £2000, the largest sum ever given in advance up to that period, in this country for a work of fiction, with perhaps the solitary exception of 'Romola.'

In its narrative form 'Foul Play' was highly successful. Then came the question of the dramatisation. Both authors took opposite views, and rode off in different directions. Boucicault took his version to the Holborn Theatre, where it failed most signally. Reade brought his adaptation to me. It was a powerful but sprawling play. Strength, however, it had in abundance, and all that was necessary was to lick it into shape: how necessary this process was may be surmised by one illustration. When first put into my hands, the second act was in seven scenes: I put them all into one, suggested the whole of the business of 'The Crossing the Line' in the third act, and transposed and arranged the island act until it assumed its present form.

The drama was produced during the first season of my new theatre at Leeds with immediate and pronounced success—a success which Reade was generous enough to attribute as much to the excellence of the acting as to the excellence of the work.

He was always jealous of his "words," and woe betide the unhappy wight who dared to tamper with them. It required great diplomacy to induce him to accept my cutting and slashing and recon-

struction before we commenced rehearsals; but when we got on the stage not another word would he allow to be cut. At the end of the fourth act he had allotted me a speech of twenty tedious, explanatory lines to speak, after the heroine had quitted the stage, and I was left alone on Godsend Island. It was in vain that I pointed out that the speech was an anti-climax, that the explanation could be deferred to the next act, etc. 'My composition, my boy; my composition!' he exclaimed; 'besides, it is the articulation' (a favourite word of his) 'of the act.' I might as well have whistled against thunder as argue with him while he was in the imperative mood; so I said no more about it, but took my own course. I arranged privately with the prompter to 'ring down' at the proper climax of the scene, and the result was as I had anticipated—the act-drop fell amidst a perfect tempest of applause. We had achieved a genuine *coup-de-théâtre*, and the audience 'rose at us'; nor would they suffer the play to proceed till the author himself bowed his acknowledgments, when they cheered him again and again. Then, panting with excitement, while tears of joy ran down his cheeks, he absolutely hugged me with delight, as he exclaimed: 'Oh! you traitor! —you villain!—you young vagabond!—you were right after all!—it's beautiful!—beautiful!'

On this occasion he wrote thus to Mrs Seymour:

'You will be pleased to hear that the *first call* was for me.

I was rather reluctant to bow before an actor had received ovation, but Coleman came and made me, and certainly I never was received with such enthusiasm.

The men stood up, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs to me all over the house.

I thought I was in France.'

When the play, at the end of the run in Leeds,

was transferred to Manchester, one of the great unknown took exception to the representation, whereupon the author took up the cudgels, and responded after this fashion:

To the Editor of the "Examiner" and "Times."

'Sir,—The *Manchester Examiner* of June 25 contains some remarks upon the above drama which amount to this, that it is respectably written, but poorly acted at the Theatre Royal. This summary is calculated to mislead the public and to wound artists of merit. Permit me, then, to to correct the error.

A dramatist is entirely at the mercy of his actors: let him write like an angel, they can reduce him to the level of Poor Poll. You may, therefore, lay it down as a mathematical certainty that a drama is very well acted if it holds an audience tight for three hours and forty minutes, eliciting laughter, tears, applause, and few or no yawns. To go into detail, which is the surest way, Mr Coleman plays Robert Penfold with the variations of manner that difficult character requires. Easy and natural in the prologue, he warms with the advancing action. His manner of dealing with the difficult tirade in the fourth act shows a thorough knowledge of his art, and he works the act up to a climax with a fire that is invaluable to me, and rare on any stage. This earnest, manly performance in pathos and variety is unsurpassed — in power unsurpassable.

Miss Henrietta Simms is an actress—young in years, but old in experience—who has often played leading business at the Adelphi Theatre. She has presence and dignity, yet can be sprightly without effort. She lacks neither fire nor tenderness; and, as one example how far she can carry those qualities, let me point to four speeches she delivers in the principal island scene. They follow upon Robert Penfold's defence, and might be profitably studied

both by actors and critics. But elocution is only a part of the great histrionic art. In fact, what reveals the true artiste at once is his dumb play. Now in this branch of her art Miss Simms has hardly a living rival. Let anybody who cares to test this statement watch the changes of her countenance when Robert Penfold and the others are speaking to her. Let him observe her when Arthur Wardlaw places in her hands the pearl from Godsend Island, gradually her eyes dilate, her lips part, and, long before she speaks the commonplace line I have given her, all the sweet memories of love flow into her face and elevate it with a tenderness that has really something divine. Such strokes of genius partake of inspiration, and are the glory of that enchanting art which is so plentifully written about but, alas! so little comprehended. Now for the smaller parts, which, as your contributor seemed to think, play themselves. I know the London stage by heart, and there is not an actor on it who can look and play Wylie as well as Mr Horsman does. Mr Horsman's performance has, upon the whole, breadth and geniality. Mr Edwards is a tragedian, who plays a part he dislikes to oblige us. The part contains few of those strong effects which suit him, but he never misses one.

The fourth act of this play reveals a sailor lying on a bank, sick, and near his end. He is left alone, and has a soliloquy of eight lines. With these eight lines, and the business that belongs to them, an actor holds a large audience hushed and breathless, and draws many a tear from men and women. And who is this magician? It is Mr Royce, the low comedian of Mr Coleman's company. Is it usual in this city for low comedians to draw more tears with eight lines than some tragedians draw with eight plays? If not, why pass over Mr Royce as if I had written *him* along with the lines he delivers so exquisitely? Mr Chute, a manager, and a veteran actor, plays the little part

of Wardlaw, senior, to oblige me, and I begin to fear he plays it too well. The purity, the quiet dignity, and gentlemanly ease with which he invests it are too rare upon the stage to be promptly appreciated. All I can say is that since Dowton's time I have seen nothing of this class so easy, natural, and perfect.

I fear, sir, I have trespassed on your courtesy; but I am sure you would not willingly lend yourself to an injustice, and I even think and hope that, should your critic revisit the theatre, he will come round to my opinion—viz. that "Foul Play" owed a large share of its success to the talent and zeal of the performers, not even excepting those who play the small characters.—I am, sir, your obedient servant, CHARLES READE.

PALATINE HOTEL, 26*th June* 1868.'

At this distance of time (leaving myself utterly out of the question!) I am emboldened to say that upon its first production this was not only one of the best mounted but one of the very best acted plays of this generation.

Despite Reade's elaborate theories about art, in reality he was only guided by actual practical results. I have frequently known him take grave exception to an actor's conception of a part at rehearsal, but if the offender struck fire at night the end justified the means, even if his views were diametrically opposed to those of the author. If from some adverse circumstance—a bad house, an east wind, an unsympathetic audience—the play did not elicit the usual modicum of applause, then the actors were stigmatised as "duffers"—"duffers, sir, who have defiled my composition, mixed ditch-water with my champagne, murdered my work." The next night, perhaps, there was a good house; perhaps the wind was not in the east; perhaps a thousand things: at anyrate, if the play was received enthusiastically, then all was condoned and forgiven. The popular applause was music to him;

he would ensconce himself in his box, turn his back to the stage, and as the audience laughed or cried he laughed and cried with them, and their tears or cheers were always his barometer of the actor's ability. I have often heard him say that he thought the great orator or the great actor quaffing the full wine of applause, crushed in one moment into a golden cup and drained from the public heart, was the most enviable of human beings.

No human being, however, ever presented a more extraordinary mass of contradictions than this man. If anyone assailed him he dipped his pen in vitriol, and poured the vials of his wrath upon his luckless adversary. On these occasions nothing could restrain the headstrong rush of his impetuosity, nothing check the torrent of his effusive objurgations. Yet, on the other hand, if called upon to advise a friend under similar circumstances he not infrequently exercised quite a judicial function, and was the very incarnation of mildness.

A remarkable illustration of this occurred while we were at X——. The night before our opening a certain pressman had, in the fulness of his heart and the bitterness of his hate, somewhat indiscreetly, announced over 'his pipe and his pot' his intention of 'slating' us. This ornament to journalism turned up at night very drunk, and absolutely unable to get into the theatre without assistance. He slept quietly and composedly through the greater portion of the performance. All the same, the next day we got the promised 'slating.'

Perhaps no man has been more fulsomely flattered or more villainously abused than I have been, consequently I have learned to take 'fortune's buffets and rewards with equal thanks'; but this onslaught (knowing its origin) was more than I could stomach, so I rushed to the ink-pot, and wrote a letter that was, I fear, more distinguished by vigour of vituperation than anything else. When I had finished this precious epistle I took it to Reade. He read it carefully, and said very quietly:

'Yes, a good letter—very good. Couldn't you make it a little hotter?'

'I'll try,' said I, and in the innocence of my heart I took it away, and, after half-an-hour spent in polishing it up and embellishing it with every epithet of scorn and contempt in my vocabulary, I returned in triumph.

'Not hot enough by half, my boy,' said he. 'Put it by for a week, then read it; put it by for another week, and then—put it in your scrap-book, or, better still, put it in the fire. Stop! I'll save you the trouble.' And he put it in the fire there and then, saying, "now it is as hot as it can be made." So there was an end of that letter.

Now for the obverse of the picture. During the run of 'Foul Play' in Manchester we had gone to pass Sunday at the Theatre House in York, and on our way back, after my wont, I bought all the papers and magazines I could lay my hands on at the railway station. Among them was a copy of a satirical journal called *The Mask*. Upon opening it I found a loathsome cartoon of Reade and Boucicault on the first page, and, further on, a violent personal attack on both authors, accusing them of having stolen 'Foul Play' bodily from a French drama (by an author whose name I have since forgotten) called 'La Portefeuille Rouge.' Side by side with the Boucicault and Reade composition was printed the text of the French author. As I looked up I saw Reade in the opposite corner of the carriage with eyes apparently closed. In certain moods he had a facility for feigning sleep, just like a cat waiting to spring upon an unfortunate mouse. Holding my breath I furtively tried to slip *The Mask* under the seat. At this moment, to my astonishment, he opened his eyes wide, and said: 'John, when you've done with that *yallow* magazine, hand it over this way.'

I handed him the *Cornhill* and tried to hide the other behind me.

'Not this!' he said: 'the *other yallow* thing!'

There was no help for it, so I gave it him. He cast a disdainful glance at the caricature, and shrugged his shoulders in silence; but when he had finished reading the *acte d'accusation* he flushed up to the eyes, exclaiming: 'It is a blasted lie, an infamous calumny! I never even heard the name of the infernal piece!'

I don't think he had; but if his *collaborateur* had not, I am very much mistaken. Anyhow, in the Godsend Island scene, he had hit on the same idea, the same incidents, and something very like the same words as the Frenchman, only, unfortunately, the Frenchman had hit upon them first. The "undying one" was too old a bird, and too accustomed to poach upon other people's preserves, to be trepanned into correspondence on the subject. Reade, however, despite his good advice to me, rushed at his assailants like a bull at a gate, and vented his rage in a rabid and remarkable paper, published under the title of 'The Sham Sample Swindle.' It is easier, however, to pelt one's adversaries with hard words than to refute a charge of plagiarism, and in this instance it must be admitted the 'pseudonymunculæ' had the best of it.

At the end of our engagement in Manchester I organised a tour of the principal theatres, retaining all the artists to whom Reade makes such flattering reference except myself, for whom I obtained an adequate substitute in the person of Mr J. F. Cathcart, so long sub-lieutenant to Charles Kean.

Having started the tour successfully in Glasgow I was going to Paris for a holiday, and called at Albert Gate to make my adieux.

Here was another 'wrong to Ireland.'

It was idle to suggest to Leo I needed a little relaxation to enable me to superintend half-a-dozen theatres and three or four companies. With charming insouciance he replied: 'That's nothing to me; but *my* piece—my piece is everything—more especially since Dion has failed in *his*! I want to show *him* and the duffers of the press gang that I can write a

play by myself, and—here you are going away—going to Paris too! Leaving the ship without rudder or compass—more especially without the captain!' At this moment in came a telegram from Glasgow: 'House £210—piece going like wildfire.' Then he complacently remarked: 'Ah well! after all it is the piece—the author does the trick! If you see Boucy be sure to let him know what the house is to-night—it will make him sit up—won't it, Laura?'

'Charles,' replied Geria, 'you are the vainest man I ever saw.' 'John,' she continued, 'for heaven's sake let this maniac have that telegram to show at the Garrick to-morrow and then he'll be happy.'

On returning from my holiday I found him in one of his periodical fits of despondency. The failure of Boucicault's version of 'Foul Play' at the Holborn was as fatal to us as to him, and our play was practically banished from London.

. . . . . .

A few months later Reade wrote me he had dramatised 'Griffith Gaunt,' and sent me the play to read.

I read it carefully, found an abundance of good stuff in it, but it was constructed so loosely, and ended so clumsily, that I could see no possibility of success, and declined to produce it; whereupon he made up his mind to produce it himself, and did so, first at Newcastle-on-Tyne, and next at Manchester in 1868.

He begged me to come and see it at Manchester, alleging that he had made many cuts and improvements. I did see it, but under disadvantageous circumstances.

Nothing was done in the way of scenery, costumes, or appointments, nor did the acting ever rise above mediocrity. Miss Avonia Jones (Mrs G. V. Brooke) was a sensible intelligent actress, rather a fine woman, with a pronounced American accent, but too frequently flatulent and noisy, and totally deficient in the refinement and distinction absolutely essential to the high-bred Kate Gaunt.

Mr Henry Sinclair, from Drury Lane—the Griffith Gaunt—gave but a commonplace impersonation of this Cumberland Othello; while George Rignold was characteristically bucolic in Tom Leicester, Gaunt's half-brother.

Despite all drawbacks the play impressed me with its tremendous strength, its suggestion of strong emotional power, and its remarkable possibilities of being made a great popular attraction if properly treated. It *was* properly treated at a later period, as will be shown in its proper place!

Finding ourselves still shut out of London with "Foul Play," and firmly believing in its attraction, it was arranged between Reade and myself that I should go to America to produce that and other plays.

It was essential for me to take ship on a certain day to anticipate the action of transatlantic pirates who had, as usual, stolen a copy of our play. My baggage was in Liverpool, my berth secured, when an accident prevented my sailing. I had to attach my signature to the lease of one of my theatres, fortunately for me the document was not ready. I say fortunately advisedly, inasmuch as upon the production of the piece in New York a curious exchange of civilities took place. I forget the exact circumstances, save that I know revolvers were introduced and used pretty freely, and two or three people were killed and others badly wounded. On the whole I did not regret my absence on that interesting occasion.

Abandoning altogether the projected tour to America I suggested to Reade the subject of the Sheffield outrages for a story, and a drama with a part in it, which I thought especially adapted to my method and resources. He accepted the suggestion, and we went over to Sheffield together, where I introduced him to Mr Leng, the courageous journalist ('Holdfast'), through whose initiative, and the indomitable pluck of the late Mr Roebuck, the Parliamentary Commission was obtained, by means of which the perpetrators of the atrocities were

unearthed. Before leaving the town we interviewed the miscreant, afterwards introduced into the story as Grotait, and went to his public-house to make certain sketches; we also visited the scenes of the various outrages, so as to provide ourselves with local colouring for the future drama. On its production in the *Cornhill* the novel 'Put Yourself in His Place' created a great sensation: but the drama?

Our intention was to do it for a week in Leeds at the end of the summer season, as a sort of public rehearsal, then to take the Adelphi and produce it there. The difficulty was that it involved as much expense to "get it up" for a week as for a month or two; but that could be got over by utilising our scenery and appointments in town. Although the drama was as yet unwritten, we had arranged the scenario, and I took my scenic artist with me over to Sheffield, where we spent a week in making sketches of scenery.

On our return my people went to work with a will, and very elaborate preparations were made for the production.

My own company being then on tour with 'Foul Play' I had to engage people from all parts of the kingdom.

Reade promised to be ready with the manuscript and parts for the first rehearsal, which was to take place a week previous to the date arranged for the production of the play. When he arrived I found, to my dismay, that he had only completed the first act. He assured me, however, that he had got it all in his head, and that he could get it out as quickly as he could write it down. We commenced our rehearsals, and he stayed at home to work at the remainder of the play. Alas! the next day he was taken seriously ill with a virulent attack of neuralgia and toothache, which prostrated him during the greater portion of the week. It was not until the following Monday (the day on which the play actually ought to have been produced) that we got even the second act.

I was so dissatisfied with the state of affairs that,

foreseeing nothing but failure, I was disposed (despite the great expense already incurred) to abandon the idea of doing the piece altogether; but he appealed to me so strongly on the subject that my better judgment gave way, and I weakly yielded to his wishes.

The position was most disheartening and distressing. It was now Wednesday. The third act was a bitter bad one, and there was neither time nor opportunity to revise or alter. Under no circumstances could the existence of the piece be prolonged beyond Saturday, inasmuch as on Monday the Italian Opera Company opened. After them came Schneider and company, with the "Grande Duchesse," and "Orphie aux Enfers"; after her, Charles Mathews, Phelps, Sothern, and the dog-days. Altogether, it was a bad look-out. Driven to desperation, I announced the piece for Friday. The company were letter perfect in the first three acts, and by half-past eleven on Thursday night our preparations, scenery, music, costumes, etc., were as complete as I could make them.

At twelve o'clock, Reade, pale and exhausted, came with the last act. I had prepared some refreshment for the company, and requested them to wait in the green-room while I ran through this act with him. I then called everybody on the stage, and, holding the manuscript, read through every part, and arranged the business and the music of every situation three times consecutively. This occupied us until two o'clock in the morning. Dismissing the rehearsal, I then called the last act for two o'clock in the following afternoon. I copied my own part there and then. The prompter and copyist, whom I had taken the precaution to send home hours before, so that they had been at rest all the evening, now took the manuscript, and sat up all night to copy the other parts. At eight o'clock in the morning every lady and gentleman was furnished with his or her part.

And now occurred a circumstance without parallel or precedent in the history of the drama! Notwith-

standing the fatigues and anxieties of the preceding night, and the lateness of the hour at which they quitted the theatre, to the honour of the company be it stated, that every one turned up letter perfect in the text at the two-o'clock rehearsal, and that night 'Put Yourself in His Place' was produced textually perfect, and without one hitch from the rise to the fall of the curtain!

My worst anticipations were, however, realised. Through the uncertainty of the announcements, there was a very bad house. The first act struck fire; the church scene, in the second act, electrified the audience; in the third act the interest drooped; in the fourth act it died out altogether, like the expiring gleam of a farthing rush-light! On Saturday the house was no better, and the verdict of the preceding night was not reversed. The play was a direful failure, and involved me in a loss of upwards of £600 on the two representations, as well as depriving me of a cherished illusion, as I had hoped to distinguished myself in the hero. There was an abundance of splendid material in the work, finely drawn characters, vigorous lines, exciting incidents, but it was put together so hastily, and so crudely, that it was utterly impossible for it to succeed.

I suggested entire reconstruction, but the author would not hear of it. Finding that he remained obdurate, I resolved to have nothing further to do with the piece.

> 'Convince a man against his will,
> He's of the same opinion still,'

and Reade had an unfortunate faculty of believing that everyone was wrong—but himself.

. . . . . .

I had got up 'Sardanapalus' for the ensuing season. On the second or third day I received one of his characteristic letters.

'Now you've got Byron on the brain (mind! your precious 'Sardanapalus' is a bitter bad play,

though it were fifty times Byron!) I suppose you can spare me a few of the original people for 'Put Yourself in His Place' which I'm going to do at the Adelphi next month.

I've secured Neville for your part, and he's going down to Sheffield to learn how to make a knife, which is more than you ever could do with all your cleverness! He'll do it at the forge in sight of the audience, and you'll see how that will 'knock 'em!'

Apropos: since you've no longer any use for the forge or the bellows, or the other 'props,' you might let me have 'em. I want also that inspired idiot 'the Rattener.'

Let me have the prompt-book with all your business carefully marked (I'll pay copyist), and as I was unable to be present at a single complete rehearsal send 'Little Coley' to hold the book; he knows your business by heart.

'Wire when I may expect him.'

Apropos of 'Little Coley'

A good many years ago (I can't fix the precise date, but I know 'twas in the Fechter era, because I was on my way to dine with him, John Oxenford, and Augustus Harris the Elder at the Theatrical Fund dinner, Freemason's Tavern, when the event took place to which I am about to recur) I had been a subscriber from its commencement to a weekly journal of advanced views called the *Leader* (the precursor of the *Saturday*, and of all the present race of sixpennies), and stopped at Onwhyn's news-shop in Catherine Street (where the Gaiety now stands) to get a copy.

As I entered, the shopman behind the counter inquired of a customer in front: 'Are you going to see Hamlet to-night?'

'Who's the Hamlet?' inquired the customer.

'Mr Coleman.'

'Can he act?'

'Evidently he thinks he can,' replied the shopman, handing his customer a programme headed,

'*Cabinet Theatre, King's Cross.* Hamlet, Mr George Davenport Coleman.'

That announcement attracted my attention, and I kept on the *qui vive* for further information about my namesake.

A few weeks later I saw him announced at Sadlers Wells (then under the management of Miss Fanny Josephs) for Hamlet, Romeo, and Claude Melnotte, and heard it rumoured that he was not only financing the affair, but had actually been down to Knebworth to interview Lord Lytton with the view of inducing him to write another "Lady of Lyons" to enable him to take the West End by storm.

Apparently his lordship did not rise to the bait, and the would-be Claude disappeared into private life.

Having, however, once rubbed shoulders with the wings, of course he emerged again.

One day a lady, a friend of mine, intimated she had met him, that he had shed his amateur wild oats and resolved to begin at the beginning—to learn his business—and that he wanted an engagement with me, inasmuch as seeing me enact Hamlet had inspired him with the desire to try his hand himself.

My fair friend insisted on my seeing her protégé, and, as 'I never could say nay to lovely woman,' I complied with her request.

My namesake turned out to be a lady-like little chap of five feet nothing.

He told me frankly that he had squandered his small patrimony in his experiments at the Wells, and that it was imperatively necessary to obtain employment to enable him to obtain bread, even without butter.

He was so ingratiating, so amiable, and so modest, that I took to him at once; but he was so handicapped by his voice and his stature that I had great difficulty in procuring him an engagement.

At last, however, I succeeded in placing him in Birmingham.

Photo by the London Stereoscopic and Photographic Co.]

ADA CAVENDISH

MRS JOHN WOOD

The 'gods' there are somewhat exacting, and wouldn't have him at any price, as I found to my cost soon afterwards, inasmuch as when playing Guildenstern with me the barbarians actually guyed him off the stage.

I next procured him a berth in Manchester, and here also the poor little chap had by no means a rosy time.

In consequence of his modest and retiring demeanour the saucy young sluts of the ballet christened him 'Doubts,' and to his great annoyance the sobriquet stuck to him. Out of evil, however, cometh good, for in Cottonopolis he became friendly with Walter Montgomery, who took him to Nottingham to assist in the management of the New Theatre there.

Here he remained till the end of the season, when he came to me as my secretary.

Mr Davenport, for so we called him at Leeds, thinking two Colemans (my brother and myself) quite enough for one theatre, was not even distantly related to me, nor, never having heard him make the slightest allusion to the existence of any relatives, have I the faintest idea as to who they were.

He had an extraordinary knack of ingratiating himself with his employers, especially those of the softer sex, of which he was a profound admirer, more especially those of opulent dimensions. He was always in love, and his affections were invariably fixed on a woman twice as big as himself, believing firmly that "in joining contrasts lieth love's delights."

He admired Mrs John Wood much for being a fine actress, but he admired her more for being a fine woman. He admired Ada Cavendish's Lady Clancarty, but he adored the fair Ada herself. He did not think much of Mrs Rousby's acting, but he idolised her beauty! And when at Covent Garden he would gladly have made a door-mat of himself for the stately and statuesque Helen Barry to have wiped her feet upon.

Wherever he went, even though the conjunction occasionally placed him in the most ludicrous positions, he was sure to declare on to the finest woman in the room.

At one of our Christmas Balls there was a lady of such gigantic dimensions I dared not tackle her. The valiant Coley, however, nothing loth, volunteered to be the man in the gap.

It was a sight for gods and men to wonder at, to see this little hop-o'-my-thumb whirling round and round in the arms of this magnificent mountain of flesh, and irresistibly suggested the idea of a shrimp embosomed on the breast of a whale.

This was, however, only one side of Coley. On the other, he could confront an army of unruly supers or a refractory *corps de ballet*; could cajole a rebellious actress or coerce a bumptious blockhead of an actor into a part "out of his line"; he could mollify importunate creditors; in fine, he could be all things to all men, and especially to all women. He was attentive, obliging, true as steel, and faithful to his salt.

A vacancy having occurred, he begged me to take him on the stage and teach him the rudiments of stage-management, which I did to the best of my ability, hence Reade's desire to have his assistance at the Adelphi, where he became acquainted with Henry Neville and Dion Boucicault, both of whom took a fancy to him.

At the end of the Adelphi season he rejoined Walter Montgomery, who had returned from America, and remained with him till the tragic termination of his career.

Shortly afterwards Boucicault opened Covent Garden with "Babil and Bijou," and engaged Coley to assist in the management. Here he came in touch with Dion's 'noble friend' and partner, who ultimately took the Olympic and engaged Henry Neville to manage it, retaining Coley for the front of the house. Here, in his turn, he introduced Charles Reade, which led to Neville's reviving 'It is

Never too Late to Mend' and 'Foul Play,' renamed (in order to dissociate it from Boucicault's failure at the Holborn) 'The Scuttled Ship.'

With Neville in my part, and Miss Bella Pateman in that of Miss Henrietta Simms, this play was received with great favour.

One of the most remarkable features of this revival was Mrs Seymour's embodiment of Nancy Rouse, this being her last appearance on the stage.

Another work of Reade's, entitled 'Jealousy' (adapted from Sardou's comedy 'André,' which, by the way, I saw at Rouen and in Paris, and, to my thinking, the Rouen rendition was much the better of the two!) was also successfully produced by Neville.

I digress here, to remark that Neville's management at this period was signalised by the production of the best romantic drama since 'The Lady of Lyons'—viz. Tom Taylor's 'Lady Clancarty.'

Some of the parts in this play were acted on the first night with a spirit, a life, and an earnestness impossible to excel. Notably my charming friend, Ada Cavendish's splendid and pathetic Lady Clancarty; Miss Fowler's piquant and delightful Lady Betty Noel; the William of Orange of Mr Sugden, then almost a novice; the admirable impersonations of Mr Vernon and Mr Vollaire; the terribly in earnest Scum Goodman of Mr G. W. Anson, the *jeune premier* of Mr Walter Fisher, an accomplished, handsome young fellow, (who alas! wrecked his own career in sight of port!); and, above all, the vigorous, manly, sympathetic Clancarty of Mr Henry Neville.

Here, too, was produced Dennerry's 'Two Orphans,' memorable for one scene (the garret) worthy of comparison with any scene ever written.

When Neville seceded from the Olympic, Coley managed it for his old friend Fanny Josephs, and when she retired, he migrated to the Court, which he managed for John Clayton to the day of his death, when he (Coley) transferred his services to Mrs John Wood, which brings me to 'Hecuba.'

Not having seen or heard anything of my little friend since I was at Drury Lane, and requiring his assistance in the verification of some dates in this work, I wrote to him the other day and found that he had 'gone away and left no address.'

Here is an explanatory note as to the cause of his silence from my excellent good friend Mrs John Wood.

THE BUNGALOW,
WESTGATE-ON-SEA,
Wednesday.

"DEAR J. C.—Your letter to little 'Coley' has been forwarded to me, but can never reach him now.

He had been very ill for a long time when he came here for the good of his health.

Alas! he came too late.

The dear little chap gradually got worse and worse, till the end came, when I am happy to say he dropped off quietly and peacefully. And now 'Home he's gone and ta'en his wages.'—Yours, etc.

M. W——."

Of all his employers I think Davenport had attached himself most to Mrs Wood. Hence he was extremely fortunate in having his last hours solaced by the kindly offices of that large-hearted and generous woman.

We sometimes rub shoulders with fate as she hurries past, and to go up one street or down another often changes the current of a life!

I wonder — 'how I wonder' (as Demetrius observes) whether this little gentleman, who for so many years took so active a part in the life, business, and pursuits of so many persons of more or less distinction, would ever have had the opportunity of doing so had I not accidentally gone into Onwhyn's shop that night on my way to dine with Fechter and the rest at the Freemasons' Tavern.

Howsoever that may be, I feel sure that all those who had the advantage of his advice and

assistance will appreciate this passing tribute to years of faithful friendship and loyal service to the writer and his friends.

Returning to 'Put Yourself in His Place,' I lent nearly all the original cast, and with Coley's assistance the play was produced, May 1870, at the Adelphi under the title of 'Free Labour.' Reade assured me 'twas excellently done, that Neville distinguished himself highly in my part, and actually *did* make the knife (on which the author's heart was set) in sight of all Israel.

Geria however assured me, in confidence, that the short life of the play was anything but a merry one, that Reade was continually assailed with anonymous letters, purporting to be from gentlemen of the proletariate of Sheffield, threatening to blow up both him and his piece with dynamite.

With a perseverance worthy of a better cause he held on, and on 15th June attempted to strengthen the bill by the addition of 'The Robust Invalid'—an adaptation of Molière's immortal work, which had long been a fad with his English admirer.

Five acts of this comedy were now attached to four long acts of "Free Labour."

To give *éclat* to the occasion George Vining was engaged for Orgon, Miss Florence Terry for Louise, Miss Julia Glover (Edmund Glover's daughter) for a minor part, while Mrs Seymour was the Toinette. Although thus admirably acted, the length of the one piece killed the other, and involved the author in a loss of from four to five thousand pounds.

That was the *coup-de-grace* to 'Put Yourself in His Place,' and to the best of my belief that was George Vining's last engagement.

Anyhow, after that he disappeared altogether from public life, and I knew not what had become of him, until one day I accidentally cannoned against him in Covent Garden Market, and he insisted on dragging me home to dine with him at his mother's

house in Highgate. It was beautiful to see the devotion of this dear old lady to 'her boy.' He was still 'her boy,' this great strapper of half-a-century.

That summer we had many delightful days and nights together.

His autumn of life bade fair to be a happy one. He was devoted to a charming and accomplished woman, the attachment was reciprocated, a day had been fixed for their wedding, when, alas! she was stricken down by some mysterious internal malady and died in a few hours.

The blow which struck her proved fatal to him. His mother insisted on his going to Gully's hydro. at Malvern. In obedience to her wishes he went there; his stay, however, was of short duration, he pined for home and mother, made his way back as far as Reading,—and there—yes, there——

Good-bye, old friend—a last good-bye.

CHAPTER V

TWO METROPOLITAN MANAGERS

Three Novels and two Plays in one Year—Failure of "A Terrible Temptation" deteriorates our Author's Value — "A Simpleton" follows suit — "Shilly Shally" successful at the Gaiety, leads to Feud with Anthony Trollope and a Lawsuit against the *Morning Advertiser* — "The Wandering Heir" is promptly dramatised by the Author, and produced in Liverpool with Mrs John Wood as the Heroine and is taken on Tour — Two idle Apprentices make Holiday at York—Reade becomes Manager of the Queen's Theatre and produces "The Wandering Heir," with Ellen Terry as the Heroine — It is acted for 130 Nights — And transferred to Astley's with dubious Success — The Writer becomes a Metropolitan Manager — To his dire Mishap exploits an Eminent Italian Tragedian and drops Thousands of Pounds in the Operation — Reade takes the Writer to Oxford prior to his *Début* in Town as Henry the Fifth

During 1870-2 Reade wrote no less than three novels and two plays.

The first of these works, "A Terrible Temptation" (published in *Cassell's Magazine* (for 1871), got him into terrible hot water at home and abroad. At home there was a row with the editor, who objected to certain details of the work and insisted either on their being rewritten or eliminated; while on the "other side" (where, as usual, the story had been stolen!) there appeared in the *Toronto Globe* three columns of vituperous misrepresentation, which Reade attributed, rightly or wrongly, to Mr Goldwin Smith.

Those who are curious in the 'Amenities of Literature' will find the author's rejoinder in 'Readiana' (p. 279).

For vitriolic vigour this epistle excels anything in the language.

Unfortunately Mr Goldwin Smith was not alone in his animadversions.

The American press had gone for 'Griffith Gaunt,' but it slaughtered 'A Terrible Temptation.'

Home-made critics were almost as bad, and the sale of the book was ruined, as it is evidenced by the following extract from our author's diary:—

'A Terrible Temptation' has been declined by all the publishers I offered it to. Smith, with compliments, says he is *afraid* to publish it.

I foresee that the librarians will all band against it, as usual; and at fifty-seven years of age plenty of hot water coming. Well, it is one more fight, that is all, for fight I must, or be crushed entirely. And this is what they call a lucky writer!'

. . . . . .

Yesterday I treated with Mr Frederick Chapman for 'A Terrible Temptation.' He gives me £600 for a three volume edition of 1500 copies. Should this be exhausted, fresh arrangements to be made. This is a pitiable decline on former sales. He gave me £1500 for limited copyright of 'Griffith Gaunt.' Bradbury and Evans gave me £2000 for ditto of 'Foul Play.'

'A Simpleton,' which appeared originally in serial form in *London Society* of 1871, was suggested by Mrs Seymour, who took an active part in collaboration, as it is evidenced by the following extract from a letter addressed to her:—

'Shall go to work *at once*, so pray send me some little material, no matter how rough, every day.

Jot it down.

Fling it on paper.

Scenes.

Observations.

Single lines.

Make a heading, 'Rosiana,' of detached simple things for her to say or do.

Oh dear! I feel rather old to have to work so hard.

. . . . . .

Thanks for hint. The ladies (once enthusiastic schoolfellows) shall quarrel in the auction room, and part for ever.

But can you not remember any little bit of colour you have seen or heard in auction rooms—any bit of Jew's chaff—any incident?

If so, send it by return, or it will be too late.'

His head, and Mrs Seymour's sagacious advice drove him to the study, but his heart always attracted him to the stage — hence, while actually engaged on this last work, he cast it impatiently aside, and took French leave to dramatise Anthony Trollope's 'Ralph the Heir,' which was produced at the Gaiety under the title of 'Shilly Shally' on 1st April 1872.

This production was a source of great trouble. Reade and Trollope were on terms of friendly intimacy, but the latter was absent in Australia, and, being ignorant of his whereabouts, Reade was unable to communicate with him. It must be counted, however, to Reade's credit that he reserved, and offered to pay, his collaborator, half the fees accruing from the representation of the play. On his return, however, Trollope not only refused to accept them, but was much incensed that Reade (who had always posed as the champion of author's rights) should have infringed them in so unceremonious a fashion.

The difference was accentuated by an article in the *Morning Advertiser* which alleged that the piece was indecent. A charge of indecency was a hard pill for either author to swallow. Reade indignantly repudiated it, and brought an action for slander, recovering £200 damages and costs.

The collaborators were both singularly irascible men, hence for a considerable period they glared at each other in silence, and Reade informed me that they were actually wont to participate in a

game of whist at the Garrick without deigning to speak to each other.

After a time, however, peace was proclaimed between the belligerents, and amicable relations resumed, a circumstance which renders Trollope's posthumous attack (*see* his Autobiography) on his old comrade somewhat inexplicable.

The publication of 'The Wandering Heir' in a Christmas number of the *Graphic* yielded a large sum, and evoked a very hot controversy with the late Mr Mortimer Collins and his accomplished wife as to an alleged charge of plagiarism from Swift in various parts of the story. There was some very hard hitting on both sides in reference to this matter. When his honesty was called in question Reade's sensibility was deeply wounded, and his anger was unbounded; yet I have reason to know that he afterwards deeply regretted some of the strong things he emitted on this occasion. His was 'a most manly wit' and he was pained to 'hurt a woman.'

Almost immediately after the publication of this story he dramatised it. As usual, the London theatres were closed against him, and, being occupied with my engagements in various parts of the country, I could no longer assist him as was my wont. He therefore took the Amphitheatre in Liverpool, where he produced the piece himself.

At his request I came over from the Isle of Man to see it. Mr Tom Taylor and his family had been staying in Douglas for the season, and as they were returning on the Monday they asked us to stay and accompany them, and we had occasion to regret that we did not take their advice, for, when they came over, the sea was like a mill-dam, while we unfortunately had a most awful passage: a ship, with all hands aboard, went down before our very eyes!

When at length we got to port Reade met us at the landing-place, drove us to his diggin's, and gave up his own rooms to us.

After dinner we went to the play, which interested and delighted us.

It was capitally acted, Mrs John Wood's Philippa especially.

Perhaps she was a trifle too plump, too ebullient, and too knowing to realise typically the girlish Philippa; yet what splendid art it was! what depths of tenderness lay under the superstructure of archness! what sublime assurance asserted itself at the tip of her saucy nose! what wealth of fun lay lurking in the corner of her eye, and ready "to play Bo-peep and burst out in spite of her!" It was worth being sea-sick from Douglas to Liverpool only to hear her say: 'Parson, please buy me a pair of breeches and make a boy of me!'

After the run of the piece in Liverpool Reade organised a company to take it on tour, engaging Miss Margaret Brennan, (an accomplished young actress) to take the place of Mrs Wood. The tour commenced in Nottingham, where he invited me to come and stay with him for a few days; and a very jolly time we had of it *out* of the theatre. *In* it he was still doomed to be unfortunate, for the houses were wretched. Subsequently he brought the piece and his company to Leeds; here again he was disappointed, so was I. Anyhow, it was no use crying over spilt milk, so I proposed that we should go over to the Theatre House in York for two or three weeks.

Dear old York is a charming city at all times, but in the summer it is more than delightful. We both cast care to the winds, and gave ourselves up to idleness and enjoyment. In the few brief holidays of my busy life, I have always felt that I had broken bounds, like a truant schoolboy, and that if found out I should be chained, secured, driven back to the grindstone; and I verily believe this was what Reade felt at that time. Certainly, he was the biggest boy in the house, always a jest on his tongue, always a laugh on his lips. Day by day, we explored the antiquities of the city and the

neighbourhood. Then there were driving, boating, and swimming. In those days he stripped like Hercules, and easily knocked me out of time in swimming, though in walking I certainly had the best of it. At night we returned, hungry as hunters; and so, with good company, good fare, quaint stories, honest mirth, and song, the joyous hours sped fast, till the bell of the old minster reminded us that it was time to go to "by-by" if we meant to get up at a reasonable hour on the morrow.

The days passed all too quickly, he had to return to take charge of his company, and I had to go somewhere to act—I forget where now.

The night before our departure a very remarkable coincidence occurred. Strolling along in the moonlight, by the river's bank, he told us a terrible story of a servant of his, who had the misfortune to be married to a morose and drunken brute, who, when not drunk was mad, perpetually ill-treating her, and starving their child, a winsome little chap of four or five. When the poor soul took service at Albert Gate she left the boy with her mother. In a fit of drunken frenzy the ruffian husband took the child away. Some weeks after the poor little fellow was found strangled in a cellar at St Giles's. Suspicion, of course, attached to the father, but he had disappeared and no trace of him could be found. The poor mother left Albert Gate, drooped, and died of a broken heart. At this stage of this awful story, just as we approached the archway under the bridge, our attention was attracted to a strange object gently floating up and down in the water under the moonbeams. It was the face, the dead face of *the* man, the very *man* we were actually talking about at that very moment.

Next day we left York.

Up to the very last Reade regarded this little holiday as a green spot in his life. Only a few months before his death, after a fit of despondency, he brightened up and exclaimed: 'Ah John! if

we could only recall the days and nights at York and at Lion House — the wit, the dalliance, the health, the strength, the appetite, the happy hours! Ah me! ah me! the days that are no more!"

The tour of 'The Wandering Heir' still continued to be unsatisfactory. The want of attraction in the piece Reade charged to the stupidity of the public. He became quite obstinate on the subject, and, to prove the provincial public wrong, in 1873 he took the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, and brought it out there, engaging Miss Ellen Terry (*vice* Mrs John Wood and Miss Brennan) for the heroine, an event which he thus records in his diary:

"Ellen Terry.—A young lady highly gifted with what Voltaire justly calls *le grand art de plaire.* Left the stage for some years. In 1873 I coaxed her back to play Philippa at the Queen's Theatre, and she was afterwards my leading actress in a provincial tour. She played Helen Rolleston very finely ('Foul Play'). In 1875 engaged to play Portia at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, where her performance was the principal histrionic attraction, the Shylock of Mr Coghlan being considered somewhat weak and monotonous.

She is an enigma. Her eyes are pale, her nose rather long, her mouth nothing particular. Complexion a delicate brick-dust, her hair rather like tow. Yet somehow she is *beautiful.* Her expression *kills* any pretty face you see beside her. She is a pattern of fawn-like grace. Whether in movement or repose. grace pervades the hussy. In character impulsive, intelligent, weak, hysterical—in short, all that is abominable and charming in woman.

Dialogue

'Ellen Terry.—And who is your leading lady now—that I may hate her?

Charles Reade.—Miss ——.

Ellen Terry (*rubbing her hands*).—Oh, I'm

so pleased. *She* can give you a good hiding. She *will* too!'

Here are Reade's last words about the fair Ellen: 'A very charming creature. I see through and through her. Yet she pleases me all the same. Little duck!'

And these were her last words about him:

'Dear, lovable, childlike, crafty, gentle, obstinate, entirely delightful and interesting Charles Reade.'

The Tichborne Claimant affair was then at fever-heat. The resemblance between that case and the case of James Annesley attracted attention to 'The Wandering Heir.' The play caught on in town, and was acted upwards of 130 nights.

Leo invited me to come up to town to see it. It was admirably done, but my pleasure in the performance was somewhat discounted by my neighbours in the stalls, a hostile and illiterate publisher, and an impudent Irish woman of uncertain age who had tried to write a book or two but had not succeeded. This Hibernian hag and this impudent cad kept up a running fire of impertinent comments utterly destructive of enjoyment.

When at length I had as much, and a little more than I could stand, I presented my card to the lady and gentleman, whereupon they 'dried up' with a bad grace, glaring insolently at me till the curtain fell.

Next day Reade telegraphed me to dine with him at the Garrick, to discuss an important proposal, which turned out to be that I should join him in management, of all places in the world, at Astley's (!) where he proposed to produce 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' with Miss Ellen Terry, Mr Calhaem, and other distinguished artists; I not only declined to participate in the speculation, but tried to dissuade him from it. It was in vain, however, that I reminded him of the Boucicaultian fiasco at the Theatre Royal, Westminister. 'He would have a shy,' he growled, 'if he lost his hat.'

I suggested that he had lost his head already.

'Suppose I have! It's my own to lose!' he retorted.

'Just so!' I replied. 'But as I've only one, excuse me if I keep it on my shoulders as long as I can.'

Of course he remained obdurate, and the result was exactly what I anticipated. He lost his money, and lost heavily.

Believing, however, that the London hall mark of 'The Wandering Heir' would prove attractive in the country, at the end of the season at Astley's he transferred the company (including Miss Terry) and the play to Liverpool with the following announcement:—

'To the Liverpool Public

'Return of "The Wandering Heir." This great drama, originally produced here and endorsed with your approbation, was immediately transferred to London.

The metropolis confirmed the verdict of Liverpool and the drama was played upwards of 130 consecutive nights at the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, by Mrs Seymour's Company.'

The tour lasted but a short time, after which he returned to the ink-pot.

For some time after this he stuck to his desk, but always buzzed about the theatres, as the moth buzzes around the flame of a candle, and but too frequently, like the poor insect, he singed his wings.

It was about this period that I singed mine by entering upon the management of the Queen's Theatre.

In opposition to his advice, and that of my friend Phelps, I commenced my campaign by the exploitation of Signor Salvini, the Italian tragedian, in the Shakesperean drama, while my friends Chatterton and Hollingshead, carried away by a

similar craze, engaged another 'distinguished foreigner,' to wit, Signor Rossi, to oppose me at Drury Lane.

The result was a disastrous failure for both.

With my expenses at £300 a night, our receipts never reached £100, and the second week they dwindled down to £18!

That was a settler for Salvini, who incontinently fled the country at a moment's notice, leaving me in the lurch. Rossi remained victorious at Drury Lane—that is to say, he stayed a week or a fortnight after the ignominious flight of Salvini. The triumph, however, was a dubious one, inasmuch as I have the personal assurance of both Chatterton and Hollingshead that in a theatre which could hold £1250 a night, the *entire* receipts of Rossi's last week (three nights and a matinee) amounted to a total of £45!

It then occurred to the victor in this sterile strife that the best thing he could do would be to follow the example of his defeated and detested rival, and return to his beloved Italy.

It may be recorded here as one of the curiosities of London management that my losses on this disastrous speculation, including as it did the preparations for "Othello," "Hamlet," and "Macbeth," rental, etc., were counted by thousands; and the expenditure incidental to my own opening in "Henry V." made a hole in £6000 more.

When our preparations commenced Reade was once more in his element. Scarce a day or night passed that he was not on the stage or at my house, advising, suggesting, and taking as much interest in the fortunes of "Henry V." as if he were to be the hero of Agincourt instead of myself. Months of hard work and anxiety began to tell on me. A few weeks prior to the production he said to me: "You are tired and overworked. I want you to be as fresh as paint when you come out. Let us run down to Oxford for a few days, and I'll undertake to freshen you up."

So to Oxford we went. He did the honours of the glorious old city, showed us all the lions, the stately colleges, the beautiful gardens, the statues, the libraries—the Bodleian especially—where he assisted me in hunting up certain authorities I required. On Sunday he donned his cap and gown and escorted us to his collegiate church. It seemed strange to hear everybody call him "doctor," though not at all strange that (whatever might have been the case formerly) now everyone he met appeared to love and honour him. Of course, I inquired where the theatre was. He flushed with indignation as he made answer:

'In the old times plays were acted here in the college halls by the great players of the Elizabethan age, and later periods before kings and queens, chancellors, vice-chancellors, deans, fellows, professors, and the like; yet now, here, where every stone in the street knows my footfall; where, please God, my name will be remembered when I am dead, now, while I am living, there is not a place where one of my plays can be acted; for the theatre—the theatre, dear boy (I should be ashamed to show it to you)—would disgrace a decent show at a country fair.'

While listening to this indignant denunciation, I little dreamt that in time to come I should even for a single night be condemned to act in the miserable shed which, to the discredit of the municipality, the authorities of the University, and the nineteenth century, is still designated the 'Theatre Royal, Oxford.'*

When the curtain fell on "Henry V." on the night of my *début* my dear friend was the first man to come round to my room to congratulate me, and the last to leave it. Had I been his son he could not have taken greater pride in me or have manifested more tender sympathy.

* This scandalous anomaly has been recently removed, and Oxford has been provided with an elegant and commodious theatre.

Next morning at ten o'clock he was at my house. A certain journal had distinguished itself more by the virulence and mendacity than by the veracity of an onslaught on me and on my production. I had seen it before his arrival. He burst out: "You've seen it, of course you have. Some damned good-natured friend would be sure to let you know. Don't heed it, dear boy; don't heed it. Look how they served me. Remember how that wooden-headed bully and blockhead in the *Edinburgh*, and that donkey in the *Saturday* let me have it. Bah! what does an idiot like that know about the divine art of acting? What was it Dryden said to Nat Lee of the duffers of their time?—

> 'They praise while they accuse
> The manly vigour of your youthful muse;
> For how should every sign-post dauber know
> The worth of Titian or of Angelo?'

There, there! not a word about it; don't even think of it. We shall expect you to dinner to-night, seven sharp. Ta, ta.' And away he went, leaving me all the better for his sympathy.

CHAPTER VI

AN OBJECT-LESSON FOR MANAGERS

A Meeting in Manchester—'Joan' *v.* 'Valjean'—The Author of 'Joan' comes to see 'Valjean'—The Author of 'Valjean' goes to see 'Joan,' and pays for his Whistle—Valedictory—Original Cast of 'It is Never too Late to Mend'—The one and only "Jacky" —'Ad Plures,' 'Griffith Gaunt,' and 'Pericles'—Production of 'Pericles' with the Lyceum Company at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon—'Griffith Gaunt' still await the Hour and the Woman!

When, later on, I took Henry V. in the country, he produced, (as before stated,) 'Foul Play,' renamed 'The Scuttled Ship,' at the Olympic, and 'Jealousy,' taken from Sardou's "Andrée."

Soon afterwards a story was published in America called 'That Lass o' Lowrie's.' It was written by a lady (Mrs Hodgson Burnett), evidently an Englishwoman, for it was a very faithful transcript of Lancashire life. Reade was so struck with it that, without saying 'with your leave or by your leave,' he dramatised it!

The authoress was naturally indignant. It was in vain that he urged that every story he had done had been pirated in America. She retorted that she had never pirated his works, and therefore he had no right to pirate hers. In vain he offered to divide any emolument which might accrue with her. She remained obdurate, he remained obstinate; and once more he had recourse to the Amphitheatre at Liverpool for the production of 'Joan' (so he called his new play), and again the ill-luck which so frequently attended his attempts at management followed him.

The very next week I happened to be fulfilling a fortnight's engagement at the Theatre Royal, Manchester. To my astonishment and delight he turned up at my rooms the very morning of my arrival. His lodgings were but a stone's-throw from ours, and while we remained in Manchester we were inseparable.

'Joan' was being acted at the Queen's Theatre there by his company. He admitted frankly that it was a rank failure; he could not understand the reason why, but there was the fact staring him in the face nightly in the shape of empty benches.

Au contraire, we were so fortunate as to 'strike oil' at the Theatre Royal in my play of 'Valjean,' taken from 'Les Miserables,' which, when last in Paris, I had obtained Victor Hugo's permission to dramatise. Guided, as usual, by practical results, Reade turned his back upon his own play and came to see mine nightly. After he had been once or twice he began, after his old fashion, to take stock of the audience and to interpret the piece through their smiles and tears and their applause. Evidently this popular barometer satisfied him, for that night at supper he proposed to me to come to town and open the Queen's with 'Valjean,' at Christmas. He would revise it, attach his name to it as joint-author, finance it, and provide a magnificent *mise en scene*. He was eager for the fray, and wanted to go into it at once. Unfortunately, I had made other engagements for Christmas, and was thus compelled to forego a chance which might have retrieved his losses and my own.

At the end of my engagement I had to go to Scotland, but, at his request, we prolonged our stay in order to see 'Joan.' After the play he took us home to supper, and then frankly asked me what I thought of the piece. I told him that I thought he had never written nobler lines or more graphic sketches of character, but that the gloom, the squalor, the everlasting minor key which pervaded the entire

drama would prevent its ever becoming a popular success. In the fulness of time he himself reluctantly arrived at the same conclusion.

Miss Rose Leclerq, who joined us at supper, was also anxious to know what I thought of her 'Joan.'

In order to give a faithful portraiture of a Lancashire lass of the lower orders, this admirable and accomplished actress had taught herself, with infinite trouble, to efface her own charming personality, and to speak from the bottom of her boots in a barbarous and cacophonous dialect absolutely painful to listen to.

On the strength of an old friendship I earnestly warned her against this pernicious habit lest it should become ineradicable.

I have been sorry ever since that I offered this advice, for from that moment she went into the opposite extreme; the glorious contralto became subdued into a finicking falsetto, and this most womanly of women was transformed into the mincing matron of fashion, of which she ultimately became the accepted and, it must be added, somewhat exaggerated type.

As we went away into the winter's night, Reade in the most fatherly manner took a huge silk muffler from his own throat and tied it round mine. We never paid so dearly for seeing a play, for the very marrow in our bones seemed frozen when we got to Glasgow the next day.

Immediately after this visit to Manchester it occurred to the new management of the Princess's that 'Never too Late' had not been acted in town for years, that it had been a great success at that theatre before, and might be so again.

Since the name of this play is about to disappear from these pages I devote a few valedictory words to the subject.

Imprimis. Here is the original cast, the cast at Manchester, and the cast in town:

	Original	*Manchester*	*London*
Tom Robinson	Coleman	Henry Loraine	George Vining
George Fielding	Edward Coleman	Henry Sinclair	George Melville
Isaac Levi	Johnson Towers	John Pritchard	Tom Mead
Meadows	Mathews	Fred Everill	Fred Villiers
Eden	Towers	Edward Coleman	J. G. Shore
Crawley	Walmsley	Thompson	Dominic Murray
Hawes	Loome	Loome	Blauchamp
Jacky	Calhaem	Calhaem	Calhaem
Josephs	Clara Dillon	Clara Dillon	Louisa Moore
Susan	Grace Leigh	Caroline Carson	Katharine Rodge

Every member of these three companies, save the lady who was then Miss Carson (and who is said to be as charming at her maturity as she was superbly beautiful in her youth), has followed the author and his faithful Egeria into the land of shadows.

I, and I alone, who first produced the piece and enacted the principal part, survive to tell the story of its production.

Some of the original actors were quite unknown to fame, others came with their passports endorsed by Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Birmingham, Bath, Bristol, and London.

Their triumphs were so ephemeral that their very existence is almost forgotten now, hence I devote these lines to their memory.

The first play I ever saw, was in my native town (Derby), where I was taken as a child to see 'The Field of Forty Footsteps,' a drama founded (as I learnt afterwards) upon a famous story by Miss Porter, a popular novelist of sixty years ago. The hero, Sir Arthur Matchlowe of that ilk, was Mr Johnson Towers, destined at a later period to become manager of the Victoria Theatre, and leading actor thereof.

To my unsophisticated mind this gentleman was a demi-god, who fell from his high estate when he descended to the 'New Cut.'

After some years of profitless probation there he retired, and sought employment elsewhere. Failing an engagement in town he obtained one at Southampton, where we first became acquainted during a flying engagement of mine.

I was then about to go into the management of the Great Northern Circuit, and was so impressed with his modesty, his industry, and ability that I there and then engaged him for my stage-manager, in which position he remained with me for many years.

In certain parts he was invaluable — notably, The Ghost, Sir Peter Teazle, Sir John Vesey, Captain Fairweather ('Poor of London'), The Spanish admiral ('True to the Core'), Henry VIII. ('Katharine Howard'), Hawkshaw ('Ticket-of-Leave Man'), Don Salluste ('Ruy Blas'), and the Abbé de Latour ('Dead Heart').

He was the original Isaac Levi, and it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to have found a better one.

My impression is that (although singularly reticent on the subject) Mr Towers derived his origin from the Great Historic race.

I arrived at this conclusion partly from his having selected a beautiful Hebrew melody (associated, I believe, with the Jewish ritual) to precede and accompany his entrance, but principally because of the solemnity and dignity with which he made Isaac Levi champion the wrongs of his people.

The original Susan Merton, was not a great actress, but she was a charming and accomplished woman. Too *spirituelle* and *distingué* in manner for the robust Susanna she nevertheless presented a delightful impersonation, of which the distinguishing characteristics were sincerity, ingenuousness, and womanly tenderness.

The boy Josephs, was enacted by Miss Clara Dillon, daughter of one of the most distinguished actors of the English stage, and it is simple justice to say she played the part better than it has ever been played since.

Were earnestness, intelligence, pathos, and a voice of almost matchless melody the only requisites essential to the embodiment of George Fielding, Edward Coleman would have been perfect in every

detail. Unfortunately, however, his physique was not adapted to the part.

Churchill's well-worn platitude:

> "Where mind prevails minor distinctions fly,
> Pritchard's genteel, and Garrick six foot high,"

is simple "Bosh!" Garrick never had to play an English Yeoman beside a huge Meadows and a stalwart Tom Robinson. Brains, however, did much to atone for my brother's lack of inches; and the author always maintained that he had never heard his words given so beautifully as by the original George Fielding. In speaking the touching farewell to home and Susan, when he came to the lines, 'There will be no church bells there to mind me of home and Susan!' there wasn't a dry eye in the house on either side the curtain.

Our Crawley was an intelligent and, indeed, artistic actor, though by no means a brilliant one. He did not, to my thinking, rise, as Dominic Murray did, to the occasion, but he was perfect in the text, earnest and conscientious.

Our Hawes was over six feet high, broad and stalwart in proportion, with a sonorous voice which might have been heard at the other end of the street. An experienced actor, and a very sensible man, he combined in his own person all the marked peculiarities of the old school — peculiarities which in this embodiment were strongly accentuated.

In real life he was gentle as a lamb, but when he entered the model prison he was transformed into the most strident bully that ever walked on two legs. The wretched prisoners trembled, the audience sat and shivered till the end of the act, when they called him before the curtain and "boo-hoo'd" him to their hearts' content, while he strode off triumphantly defiant.

In this character he had 'snatched a grace beyond the reach of art,' and candour constrains me to admit that his was one of the most impressive features of the entire performance.

So impressed was the author with it that he endeavoured to persuade Mr Hawes to come to town for the part. 'No, sir,' he replied with dignity, 'I have condescended to this brutal ruffian to obleege the 'governor,' but London—never. Nothing less than Peter Teazle or Polonius there.'

'The greatest is behind.' Jacky — the inimitable, the unapproachable Jacky!

Mr Stanislaus Calhaem had a long record behind him.

He had been a juvenile prodigy — spouting Richard, Sir Giles, Shylock, young Norval, etc. At seventeen or eighteen he became a juvenile actor and light comedian.

When on a visit to Liverpool during my school-days, I saw him play Hamlet in a remarkable composition, by the author of 'Shakespeare's Early Days,' entitled 'Yorick, the King's Jester, or the Early Days of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.' The impression left on my mind by this performance was so vivid that, years later, when I went into management, Mr Calhaem's was one of the first engagements I made.

Proficient in all the accomplishments which were then deemed indispensable for the stage, he was a capital swordsman, an admirable dancer, an excellent musician, a graceful pantomimist, and an exceedingly well-read man.

Among other accomplishments he had a taste for chemistry. While trying an experiment with some dangerous compound it exploded, fracturing his front teeth, which were so firmly fixed, that, instead of being blown out by the roots, they snapped in the middle, resulting, unfortunately, in a disfigurement for life. Under these circumstances it became essential, and, indeed, imperative, to change his line of business, hence I put him into eccentric Robsonian characters and mock-heroic burlesque.

The great tie of family was of paramount importance with him (as indeed it was with all actors of that period!), and when he became a member of my

company he never rested till his brother Frank and his father joined us at Sheffield, and very valuable recruits they were.

Having won his spurs with me as an eccentric comedian, Calhaem went to Edinburgh and Dublin, where he became a popular idol. From Dublin he joined Dillon at the Lyceum, where, shoulder to shoulder with Miss Woolgar, Lady Bancroft (then Marie Wilton), and Mr J. L. Toole, he made a great mark as Polixenes ('Perdita; or, the Royal Milk-maid'). After that he was for years with Falconer and Chatterton at Drury Lane, the Adelphi, the Princess's, and with Fechter at the Lyceum, from whence he ultimately returned to me.

He was anxious to play Crawley (originally designed for Robson), alleging that the part was in every act, while Jacky was only in one.

Knowing, however, how much depended on this part, and knowing also how thoroughly I could rely on Calhaem to carry out my views, I insisted on his accepting it. The result entirely justified my anticipations; his Jacky was a creation, a veritable and absolute incarnation of the author's ideal—so perfect in every detail that it astonished and delighted the most fastidious and exacting critic then in existence.

Returning to the later management of Princess's.

Mr Gooch had decided on the revival of 'It is Never too Late.' There was only one difficulty—the part of Jacky. Adequate representatives could be found for all the other parts. Indeed, Messrs Henry Loraine, George Vining, Sinclair, Vernon, and Henry Neville had already played my part, and Mr Charles Warner was now cast for it. There was, however, but one Jacky, and his name was Calhaem.

Strange to say, at this very time he was again under an engagement to me in Glasgow. I could ill afford to lose him, but when Reade appealed to me I could not say 'Nay.' So Jacky once more assisted to pilot 'It is Never too Late to Mend' into the haven of success.

This unique and extraordinary performance (quite worthy of being remembered with the Dundreary of Sothern, the Rip Van Winkle of Jefferson, and the Digby Grand of Irving) induced many people to believe that Calhaem could do nothing else. He was certainly not an actor of the grin and gag, scratch wig, red nose and horse collar genus, but he was a comedian of a high order of intelligence; in fact, of so high a standard that those who have never seen him in the First Gravedigger, Lancelot Gobbo, Roderigo, Glavis, Lord Tinsel, Trotter Southdown, Doctor Felix Merryweather, Toupet ('Dead Heart'), Graves, Moses, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Zekiel Homespun, Barney ('Peep o' Day'), Myles na Coppaleen, etc., can form no idea of the nature and extent of his variety. Happily he made 'a swan-like end fading in music,' inasmuch as his last prominent impersonation was the Clown in Sir Henry Irving's charming production of 'The Twelfth Night' at the Lyceum.

Lamentable to relate, the closing years of Mr Calhaem's life were clouded with misfortunes which were never of his own creation.

At a period when even eminent actors were but indifferently paid, by dint of strict economy and rigid self-denial he had saved a couple of thousand pounds, a few hundreds of which he lent the manager of a certain West End theatre, who came to grief; while, through the indiscreet advice of a relative connected with the Stock Exchange, he (Calhaem) was induced to invest the remainder of his savings in certain disastrous speculations, with the result that he parted with his last piece of scrip for a few shillings.

A virulent and long continued attack of neuritis ultimately drove him from the stage, and about two years ago, poor Jacky 'shuffled off this mortal coil' esteemed and beloved by all who knew and appreciated a blameless record and an honourable life. *R.I.P.*

Since its original production 'Never too Late' has been repeatedly revived in town. First by

Henry Neville at the Olympic, next by Gooch, then by the Gattis at the Adelphi, and more recently still at Drury Lane, where, upon its first production as 'Gold,' nearly half-a-century ago, it had achieved only a quasi-success. Time, the great avenger, reversed the original verdict, and so pronounced was the success of 'Never too Late' at Old Drury that the late Augustus Harris was induced, by my advice, to take a lease of the play, which he retained until his death, when it reverted to the author's literary executors.

In addition to the Metropolitan revivals already mentioned, this play has been acted at every theatre in the Empire. In point of fact, it has been acted thousands and thousands of times; the author has received thousands and thousands of pounds for royalties; and, finally, its attraction remains undiminished to this day!

The vicissitudes of this play form an object-lesson for dramatists and managers:

Here was a drama founded upon an epoch-making story which had passed through countless editions; a drama written by a world-renowned author, not only renowned as a novelist, but actually as a dramatist, collaborating at that very time with Tom Taylor (the most successful dramatic author of the period!) in 'Masks and Faces,' 'King's Rival,' 'Two Loves and a Life' at the Haymarket, St James's, and the Adelphi.

Spurious adaptations had enabled pirates and thieves to filch bushels of money out of the author's brains, yet when (having succeeded in legally protecting his rights) he himself wrote a play embodying his own work, no metropolitan manager would deign to even look at it!

For seven long years it lay upon the shelf, and might possibly have lain there till this day had I not fortunately exhumed it!

Nor was this the only work of Reade's subjected to the same indignity.

Thirty years ago he, as I have already stated,

dramatised one of his greatest works, 'Griffith Gaunt.'*

Always in advance of his contemporaries, it occurred to him that he might have fallen behind them, and that his work might possibly have become rococo and old-fashioned in the efflux of time; hence (knowing my iconoclastic tendencies!), a few months before his death, he invited me to collaborate, gave me *carte blanche* to revise and rewrite and reconstruct up-to-date.

Impressed as I had always been with the human and emotional strength of the subject and its potent possibilities for popular attraction, I went into the matter *con amore*.

All that his genius could accomplish, combined with all that his collaborator's intimate acquaintance with the most distinguished dramatists and the study of the best forms of dramatic art for upwards of half-a-century could suggest or devise, has been done to make this work as nearly perfect as possible, yet to this day *it remains unacted!*

I avail myself of the licence of occasion to quote a solitary exception to the too frequent fatuity of my brother managers. When with me at the Queen's, my friend Phelps assured me that his revival of 'Pericles' half-a-century ago was the crowning triumph of his management at Sadler's Wells. At his suggestion, with loving care and infinite pains, I prepared an adaptation, devised with the aid of the eminent artist, Mr Moyr Smith, an elaborate,

* "No language can overpraise what hardly any praise can sufficiently acknowledge—the masterly construction, the sustained intensity of interest, the keen and profound pathos, the perfect and triumphant disguise of triumphant and perfect art, the living breath of passion, the spontaneous and vivid interaction of character and event, the noble touches of terror, and the sublimer strokes of pity, which raise this story almost *as high as prose can climb towards poetry, and set it perhaps as near as narrative can come to Drama.* . . .

There is not another of his books which, as an all but consumate work of art, can be set beside or near this *Masterpiece*!"—ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

picturesque, and magnificent *mise en scene*, accurate costumes, etc., and offered it to manager after manager, with the usual result.

I had abandoned all hope of ever seeing it done, when lo! to my amazement, during his recent management of the Lyceum, Mr Frank Benson (up to that moment a total stranger to me) invited me—yes, actually invited me—to produce the piece, and to enact the hero, during the recent Memorial performances at the Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon!

The Lyceum stage being nightly occupied by 'Richard II.' and 'The Tempest,' we could only devote ten days to this important production, yet, thanks to Mr Benson's liberality, the loyal co-operation of his company, and, I may add, the enthusiastic support of the public, the result was successful beyond our most sanguine anticipations.

The principal journals teemed with eulogia. Clement Scott wrote three glowing columns on the work; Marie Corelli devoted no less than three consecutive articles to it; the late Dean Farrar pronounced it the most interesting production he had ever witnessed. Yet up to this moment it remains unacted in London!

These two works, 'Pericles' and 'Griffith Gaunt' would prove a gold-mine for an enterprising *impresario*, and enable a capable, ambitious, and beautiful actress to achieve great reputation.

Here is an opportunity for fame and fortune, but where is the man and the woman to dare and do?

Echo answers—where?

End of Book the Third

Book the Fourth

EGERIA

'I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure. But Thou!
If Thou should'st never see my face again
Pray for my soul!'

Book the Fourth

EGERIA

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From a Painting by Ferrault

EGERIA AS JULIET
ÆTAT 15

CHAPTER I

TWO ORPHANS

The Woman in Widow's Weeds—After many Years — Story of a noble Life — Two Orphans—Bath half-a-century ago — Generosity of Israel Vercoza—First Glimpse of Macready—Little Mother and little Sister—Arrival at Golden Cross—Vercoza's Deputy departs for South America — Blotter's Bank fails — Exit Vercoza — Alone in London — Charles Kemble and Fanny Kemble to the Rescue — From Covent Garden to the "New Cut"—"For never was a Story of more Woe, Than this of Juliet and her Romeo" — Macready — Charles Kean and William Farren at Dublin — Return to London — Advent of Aspasia—A Voyage to America — Dissolution of the Trinity — Augustus goes to Portsmouth —Seymour and Curling move over to the Majority—Egeria remains and keeps House—A last Good-Bye

In this narrative I have too long lost sight of my dear kind friend 'Egeria.'

I had occasionally heard that she was ill, but never dreamt that her indisposition was of so serious a character. Reade, however, knew better, as is evident from the following extracts from his diary, dated March 1878:—

'I have nearly lost poor Seymour by internal gout. She had a month of agony followed by long prostration. It appears to have been caused by many worries, and by applying cold water to an attack of podagra. The gout was cured thereby in a few hours, but the malady resented this and crept to the vitals. Her predecessor, Betterton, is said to have killed himself in forty-eight hours by this treatment. He was implored to play for some

friend's benefit whilst labouring under gout—got rid of it with cold water, acted, and died.'

(On this memorable occasion, by a remarkable coincidence, Betterton played Melantius in the "Maid's Tragedy" ("The Bridal") the very play in which Egeria had made her first impression upon Reade.)

'Seymour's natural inability to eat was against her. She was exhausted by pain, and not supported by nutriment. Tried homœopathy first, then allopathy. The gout was, on one occasion, relieved by belladonna, administered by me, at her request, *not* in a large dose.

She was attended twice a day by Quain, *who refused all fee.* Her illness showed this, at all events—what love and respect she was held in by all who know her, women especially, who love her because she is singularly free from the vices of her sex—vanity and malicious babbling. I took her down to Brighton, but it did her little good; indeed, she had a slight relapse there.'

Alas! I was soon to learn the truth from her own lips.

Being in town early in 1879 I called immediately at Albert Gate, and was shocked to find her so greatly changed.

She was engaged in conversation with a lady in widow's weeds, to whom she introduced me, and whom I immediately recognised as the heroine of the squalid tragedy which occurred on the memorable night of our visit to the 'Vick' before referred to.

Evidently they had finished their conversation, for Mrs Heritage tenderly embraced the invalid, and took her departure almost immediately after my arrival.

'I see you remember her,' said Egeria.

'Remember! I shall never forget the grotesque horror of that night.'

'Nor I!'

'So long ago, yet in mourning still?'

'She will wear the willow as long as she lives. But there, there! let's talk of yourself; I've not seen

you for an age. Where have you been, what have you been doing, and what brings you here?'

'Why you, of course!'

'Be off with your blarney, sir, and come to cues.'

'Well, to begin with, I want to see Charley.'

'Impossible, he's in Paris.'

'In Paris!'

'Is it anything I can do?'

'I fear not. The fact is, I've been reading 'L'Assommoir,' and I have made a play of it.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; and I've just seen a paragraph in the *Globe* stating that He is about to dramatise it. I want to know if that is true, lest I should be poaching on his preserves.'

'It *is* true—*too* true. I wish 'twere not, for I detest the beastly thing. I'm sure he'll lose money and reputation by it. I've done all I could to dissuade him, but that dreadful John Hollingshead has persuaded him 'twill be another "Never too Late."

'Mine will be an English story, and, anyhow, I'd like to hear what he has to say on the subject. What's his address?'

'Hotel de Lisle et D'Albion, Rue St Honoré.'

'May I write?'

'Certainly. Here's pen and paper. Write while I make myself decent for dinner. Of course you'll stay—you must. We shall be *tête-à-tête*, and we've much to talk about.'

My letter written and posted, dinner despatched, coffee served, we were left alone.

Although the poor dear was feeble, and suffering from great pain, her natural vivacity and flow of conversation had not deserted her.

'Come round the fire, and let's have a good long jaw. I've ever so much to say to you now I've got you alone, and we may never have another chance. I've often heard you speak to Charley of your boyish trials, your struggles, and your privations. Ah! they were child's play compared to mine.'

'You must have had hard lines, then!'

'Hard! To begin with, you were a boy. *I* was a girl. You were alone—there were two of us, and I had to be father and mother, brother and sister, and all the world to the little one, while yet a child myself — I wonder how I ever survived it. Have a weed?' she inquired, producing a cigarette.

Not deeming smoking a feminine accomplishment, I gasped: 'No, thanks!'

'You might as well. I'm going to have one, anyhow. You seem astonished, but you wouldn't be if you'd ever been in Lousiana. Everyone smokes there! When I had a violent attack of neuralgia at New Orleans the doctors prescribed smoking; it soothed my nerves. I got accustomed to it, and now I can't go to bed without it.

It's my one infirmity, and when He's at home I have to watch my opportunity, for, as you are doubtless aware, He detests the very smell of it. As a rule, I indulge in my own room and puff up the chimney; but it's Liberty Hall while He is away, so I'll mix you a glass of punch, and then——'

The glass of punch mixed, the cigarettes set going, she resumed:

'You've often said you would like to know all about me and my belongings.'

'As much as you care to tell me.'

'There's nothing to keep back — nothing that I need be ashamed of.'

'I'm sure of that.'

'You say so, but I don't think you believe it. No! you imagine I'm a woman with a past?'

'Really, I——'

'Well, I *am*—I *am*, and glory in it! But it was a clean past. Troubled, oh, so troubled, but a clean slate notwithstanding. Mother died in giving birth to my sister Carrie while I was yet a baby. Father was a surgeon in Bath—a popular one, too —with a fairly large practice.

He was one of those amiable idiots who are

friends to every one but their own family. A *bon vivant*, a good story-teller, but the fondest of fathers, who idolised the two motherless bairns who adored him.

From ten years of age I kept house, and was a little mother to Carrie, though only twelve months her senior.

We lived in the Crescent in grand style, and kept open house — gave big dinners and musical evenings.

The Bath Theatre was then a fashionable institution, and Father often took us. That was how the love of the Theatre grew into our bones.

One of our most frequent visitors was Mr Israel Vercoza, a tall, dark, handsome, Oriental-looking man of middle age, with great fiery-brown eyes and a dark beard—a most unusual thing for a gentleman to wear in those days. Apparently he was of foreign origin, Portuguese, I think! He was father's solicitor, and most intimate acquaintance. They were both late birds, and both great card-players.

One night I left them at The Devil-Books, and when I went to call Dad for breakfast in the morning I discovered he had not been in bed all night. I found him in the dining-room, nestling in the armchair, with his handkerchief thrown over his face.

'Wake up, lazy bones!' said I. 'Breakfast has been waiting this half-hour.' With that I plucked the handerchief from his face.

Poor dear! he was sleeping his last sleep, and never woke again.

Naturally, Carrie fainted — it's a way she has. As soon as I could shake her up I slipped on my things and ran down to Mr Vercoza's office in Milson Street, and told him what had happened.

He listened in silence.

'Poor old chap!' said he. After a pause, he continued: 'I must think what's best to do. But first to see about the funeral.'

'The funeral!'

'Hush! Go home! No! go to the dressmaker's, order mourning for yourself and the other girl, and tell them to send the bill in to me.'

The funeral took place all too quickly. Of all father's fine friends, the only one who accompanied us to the grave was Mr Vercoza.

He took us home to his place for dinner. Dinner! We couldn't eat a morsel. We could think only of the poor dear lying out yonder in the cold and the rain, for the drizzle drizzle which fell when we left him there, had changed into a persistent downpour.

He, there alone (let us hope *not;* for there was Mother beyond!) but we were alone, without one living relative. As to friends! Well, we should see. We *did* see.

After dinner Vercoza said: 'I have some important letters to write, so you'd better get home, little woman. Brougham's at the door. Don't sit gaping like mumchance; let go the painter and have a cry. Don't be afraid to howl: it'll do you a power of good.'

He was right—it did.

Father had kept all trouble from us. We had ate of the fat, drank of the sweet, and dressed like little duchesses while he was alive—but now?

When we got home, we found two sets of bailiffs in—one for the Queen's taxes, one for rent—a heap of unpaid bills with peremptory demands for payment, and the servants up in arms demanding to know who was to be responsible for their wages!

Fortunately the brougham remained at the door. We sprang into it and drove back to Vercoza's. When I told him the state of the land, he growled: 'H'm! I expected as much. Get in!' and he thrust us into the brougham, jumping in after us.

When we got back to the Crescent he sprang out and said to the driver: 'Go and get me a couple of Bobbies.' Then entering the house, he summoned

the bailiffs. 'Let me see your authority,' he said, very curtly. Each man produced a blue official paper. 'Now, costs!' Then writing a couple of cheques he gave them one each, and a sovereign to divide between them, *pourboire*.

As they left the room, the servants (there were five of them) swarmed in, wrangling with Joyce the housekeeper.

'Silence! you scum of the earth!' growled Vercoza, as he snatched her account out of her hand. 'Is it right, Laura?' he inquired.

'Quite!'

'Very well then, you—you Jezebel—put settled! D'ye hear—settled! Here's a cheque!'

Then calling in the police who were now waiting, he continued: 'Bundle this rubbish out!'

'But it's raining! and we want our clothes,' whined Joyce.

'Then want will be your master until to-morrow. Out with 'em!'

And out they went next minute amidst the deluge!

'Now, my lads,' he continued, slipping a sovereign apiece into the hands of the astonished police, 'lock the doors—that's right. Hand over the key.'

Then placing us in the brougham, he followed.

When we got back to his house he said to his housekeeper: 'These young ladies will sleep in my room to-night. Send 'em up a dish of tea and——'

'But these, sir?' said I, handing him a bundle of bills.

'Oh, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—we'll see about them to-morrow.'

'But, should the bailiffs——?'

'Bah! here's the key.'

'Suppose they burst the doors?'

'They know better than try a game like that with Israel Vercoza. Off you go to bed!'

That night we cried ourselves to sleep in each other's arms.

When we returned home in the morning, we

found huge placards on the house, announcing 'Sale by Auction of valuable furniture, plate, and paintings, under a Bill of Sale held and duly registered by Israel Vercoza, Esq.'

So then this was the secret of his generosity! Back we tramped to the office, where a very stormy interview took place and I fear I taxed the resources of the English language, as far I knew them, to express my opinion of his inhumanity, his actual barbarity.

He listened with patience, shrugged his shoulders, and quietly remarked: 'Very good! Now you've let off steam, go home, shut yourself up in your own room, and have another good howl! Early dinner at two o'clock will be sent in each day from 'The Hoop.' Macready is playing at Bristol. Trap and pair of horses will be at the door at four o'clock daily to drive you over there and drive you back. Don't trouble about the house—it won't run away. As for the furniture, trust my men to see to that. Mourning! What's that you say? Rubbish! All the mourning in the world won't bring my poor old friend back. Besides, people in Bristol know nothing about him or you. A Private Box is secured for each night—and—oh yes! I know I'm a brute and a barbarian, and all the rest of it. That'll do: cut your stick!'

We didn't go to Bristol the first night; but as neither that day nor the next, did any one of father's fair-weather friends deign to put in an appearance, we concluded it might be as well to go to Bristol.

Wretched as we were, Macready interested, engrossed, enthralled, opened new worlds to us.

By turns he was Hamlet, Hotspur, Macbeth, Orestes, Virginius, William Tell, Gambia, and Rob Roy, in each and all a demi-god!

Altho' he didn't make us forget our loss, he lifted us out of our present misery. As for the future!—we didn't remain long in doubt about that. The sale was to take place at twelve o'clock on

the day of Macready's benefit and last night in Bristol.

The day before, we received a curt intimation that the trap would be at the door at eleven in the morning to drive us to Clifton over the Downs, and that dinner was ordered at the new hotel there for four o'clock. At first we were indignant at being ordered about in this unceremonious manner, but when the time came we were glad to be spared the pain of seeing our household gods scattered to the winds.

On our return that night we were horrified by the dismantled appearance of the home of our childhood. In the hall Father and Mother's portraits lay against the wall amongst the general wreckage. The sight set us off, and when we got to bed we lay weeping and wailing till daybreak. By that time my mind was made up. I crept down to the surgery and routed about till I found a bottle of laudanum. When I got back I locked the door and put the bottle on the table.

'You know what that's for?' I said to Carrie.

'Yes,' she replied. 'The sooner the better.' And she threw herself into my arms.

Then—'Pat he came like Tom a Bedlam!'

'*Vercoza?*'

Of course, you goose, or how should I be here to tell you the story? It seems one of the men left in possession, saw me go into the surgery, saw me come out clasping a bottle in my hand. Fortunately, Vercoza came in at that very moment. When he heard what had happened, he was up the stairs like a lamplighter.

'Open the door!' he shouted. 'Do you hear, you young idiots! Nay then!' and bang went the door about our ears, and in he rushed. 'How dare you!—how dare you?' he roared, as he snatched the bottle from my hand and flung it through the window.

Crack, crash! Smash, smash! went the sheet of glass as we ran shrieking behind the bed; for, to

tell you the truth, we were not quite fit to receive company, being each simply attired in one indispensable garment.

'For two pins I'd take the pair of you on my knees and give you a spanking that you'll remember for the rest of your lives, you young hussies! But there, you're only children! I've had children of my own and I——'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away——'

(But I mustn't say how he finished the sentence. The next word commenced with a B—) a Big B; but it wasn't 'Blessed' I can tell you!

'In ten minutes I shall expect you in the drawing-room. In ten minutes—mind that,' he said as he left us.

When we got downstairs, he commenced very brusquely:

'Your father's debts amount to £10,000—half of which he owed to me. The sale has realised £500, which I have placed to your account—yours, Laura—at Blotter's Bank, Threadneedle Street. That's all I can do for you to make a start. I started with half-a-crown, but then I'm a man and a Jew at that, while you—God help you!—are only girls. Anyhow, the sooner you're out of this the better. I've taken two places in the mail for London to-morrow. Your father's and mother's pictures, a few knick-knacks, and your trunks will be sent on by Pickford's to your lodgings, 19 Guildford Street, Russell Square.

A friend of mine (Mr Seymour) will meet you at Golden Cross when the coach arrives. Off you go and pack up; and in view of that broken pane in your bedroom you'd better sleep at my place to-night. Dinner at seven. I'll send the brougham round for you. Mind, seven sharp!'

After dinner, over his cigar and a bottle of port, he opened out.

'I've been thinking what you'd better do for a living. You're fourteen, Laura; in another year you'll be a woman—indeed, you *are* one already. As for you, Carrie, you'll never be anything but a

kiddy as long as you live; get married and settled; there are lots of idiots ready to declare on to a pretty face like yours.

Laura, you had better go on the Stage. You are a born actress, and bound to succeed if you get a chance. It's a struggling, precarious game at first, but if you get the blue ribbon, it's glorious! I knew a girl once who—— But, rest her soul, she's gone! Jaevah—the barbarous, cruel Jaevah!—stole her—tore her from my arms—from my heart, in the flower of her youth and beauty, when the world was at her feet. But the ungrateful world has forgotten her very existence—yes, every one has forgotten her but her poor, broken-hearted old Israel!'

With that, stretching forth his arms upon the table, he bowed his head on his hands and crying 'oh, my love—my lost love!' the, hard stern man wept like a child. Presently we crept timidly up to him, put our arms tenderly round his neck, and mingled our tears with his.

After a while he recovered himself, then rising erect he invoked a blessing:

'For dear old Dick's sake, may the God of the Jew and the Gentile watch over you and protect you both! May He send you health, wealth, and prosperity, and keep you in the straight path all the days of your life!'

Then he took us to his heart, kissed us, and bade us good-night.

That was the last we ever saw of Israel Vercoza, for when we came down in the morning the housekeeper told us he had been suddenly summoned to Salisbury. He had left twenty pounds for us, and our tickets for London, and instructions for her to see us off by the mail.

We ought to have been more interested in our journey than we were, for the day was fine and the drive delightful, but we could think of nothing but the father who was dead and the friend we were about to lose.

When we arrived at Golden Cross we found a man of middle age, of rather distinguished appearance and most engaging manners, awaiting us.

'My name is Seymour, Miss Alison,' he said, 'My friend Vercoza has desired me to look after you. I knew you the moment I saw you from his description. Permit me.'

With that he handed us into a hackney coach, packed away our valise and rugs, mounted beside the Jarvey on the box, and in a quarter of an hour we were snugly ensconced in our comfortable quarters at Guildford Street, a couple of rooms on the fourth floor at fifteen shillings a week. Tea was on the table, and we invited our new acquaintance to join us.

Mr Seymour had travelled much and had seen men and cities; we had seen nothing but Bath, and were very glad to form so agreeable an acquaintance.

He called frequently, took us to see the parks and pictures, the Abbey and the river; better still, he occasionally got orders for the theatres, and took us there. His attentions were so tactful, I might almost say of so paternal a character, that if absent for more than a day or two we began to miss him.

I wrote occasionally to Vercoza, and sometimes received a hasty scrawl in reply, but not often. Meanwhile time moved on pretty quickly, but no Prince Charming came for Carrie, and no opportunity occurred for me to get on the stage, and how to set about it I didn't know.

Matters, however, were shaped for us by circumstances beyond our control. First, Mr Seymour was called away to South America, and we were alone. Next, Blotter's Bank suspended payment, and we were left penniless!

I immediately wrote to Vercoza, got no answer; wrote again (the postage of a country letter in those days was eightpence!). My letter came back from the Dead Letter Office endorsed 'Not delivered in consequence of the death of Mr Vercoza.'

We never knew how much we loved our benefactor until we lost him, and became aware that we were friendless orphans alone in the world.

Father's watch and our little trinkets had gone long ago, then His and Mother's portraits (which were works of art) had to go. We were in arrears with our rent, in arrears with the butcher, the baker, and the grocer—in arrears with everybody.

Then came the struggle for bread to keep body and soul together. At last there was nothing before us but the Street or the River!

At the very moment when we were face to face with this awful fact, the newsvendor in Red Lion Street (from whom we used to hire the *Times* at a penny an hour) sent us over two free admissions for Covent Garden Theatre.

It was Fanny Kemble's first appearance. The play was 'Romeo and Juliet.' Romeo, Mr Abbott; Mercutio, Charles Kemble; Lady Capulet, Mrs Kemble; and Juliet, Miss Fanny Kemble.

We had no dinner that day, no prospect of one for the next, and we entered the huge theatre with heavy hearts and empty stomachs, but we soon forgot all about that.

As you know, John, I am (save upon rare occasions) an extremely matter-of-fact person, but that night's performance carried me so entirely away that I forgot everything but Juliet.

I had learnt the words, knew them backward, but to see her lovely face, to hear her glorious voice, that was another thing! When we left the theatre we trod on air, till Bloomsbury brought us to earth, and we went hungry and supperless to bed. I soon fell asleep, however, and dreamt that I was playing Juliet! When I awoke, it was midday, the sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing, and my spirits rose in proportion. Carrie, poor child, was fast asleep, but I was wide awake, and my mind was made up. Springing out of bed I dressed, made myself as smart as I could, and, sans breakfast, set

off for Covent Garden, reached the stage-door, and asked to see Miss Fanny Kemble.

The hall porter demanded if I had an appointment. When I answered 'no' but implored him to take my name in, the brute curtly responded with an insolent refusal. As I turned away, heart-broken and in tears, a tall, stately, robust gentlemen came, I must not say swaggering, but lounging in, with a débonnaire grace, as if the place belonged to him—as indeed it did, for it was Charles Kemble himself!

'Heyday, little woman!' said he 'What's the matter, and who has been bringing the tears in those pretty eyes?'

'Please, sir, I want to see Miss Kemble.'

'Certainly, so you shall! Here, tuck yourself under my arm—no, you're not big enough for that—but come along, child!'

'With that he led me through the stage-door, up a flight of steps, piloted me across the great empty stage, and took me to his daughter's dressing-room, and I was face to face with the Divinity of whom all London was talking at the moment. She swept her great lustrous eyes over me (superciliously as I thought), then turning wistfully to her father, said:

'Well, father! what do the papers say?'

'D—n the papers! Sister Sarah and Brother John say that O'Neill can't hold a candle to you!'

'They're a pair of old darlings, that's what they are, and I want to hug 'em both. But' (somewhat curtly) 'what's this?'

'A little girl wants to see you. What's your name, child?'

'Laura Alison, sir.'

'Alison! Alison, eh? Where do you come from?'

'Bath, sir.'

'Bath! Did you know a Doctor of that name there?'

'He was my father, sir.'

'God bless my soul! What! Dick—handsome

Dick. I knew him very well — a good fellow— rattling good fellow!

Fan, see what the child wants, and if you want me I shall be in the Treasury. Mind you don't look at those infernal papers!' and away he strode, leaving me face to face with Fanny Kemble.

"She looked me through and through with those scorchers—that seemed as if they would make a hole in a deal board.

'Well,' she said, 'what do you want, child?'

'To play Juliet, miss.'

'H'm! A modest aspiration. So young, too!'

'I'm nearly as old as you are.'

Not quite! Besides, you haven't a father and mother like mine to teach you.'

'I have neither father, mother, nor friend.'

'No?'

'So I thought perhaps that *you* would teach me.'

'Well, I'm sure!'

'Oh, you don't know,' I burst out, 'or you would be sorry for us. There are two of us poor girls alone in this great overgrown city— penniless, destitute. I was here last night, and you set my blood on fire. Of course I can't do what you can do, but I have brains, I am not bad-looking, I am honest and true, and I can work— work! There are only three ways open—the Stage, the Street, or the River!'

'God forbid!

'If 'twere only myself I shouldn't care. After all, a penny makes one free of the Bridge, one plunge, and then—but she is too young to die, and I—— Oh, for the love of God! help us two helpless young things!' I slipped down on my knees before her, in a great passion of tears.

She lifted me up, kissed, soothed, consoled me, and led me forth to her father's room.

'Papa,' said she. 'I wish this young lady to be my understudy. Please put her down at two guineas a week, and stop it from my salary.'

'Oh! that be ——,' he burst out—stopped, blew his nose like a foghorn, and resumed: 'Come along, little one.'

'One moment, father,' and she whispered him 'You understand?'

'Certainly!'

'Kiss me once more, child!'

I dared not; I dropped on my knees, buried my head in her gown, sobbing as if my poor heart was going to burst out of my poor little body.

'Come, come!' said she. 'That'll never do if you are to play Juliet. Keep a good heart, and come and see me to-morrow!' Then she lifted me up and kissed me, and consigned me to her father who said, 'Now, little woman, trot.'

With that he led me round to the Treasury, and introduced me to a pompous old prig with white hair, a white choker, and gold spectacles, to whom the great Charles explained my engagement.

This done, he led me to the vestibule. 'By the way,' said he, 'my daughter bade me give you this,' and he handed me a ten-pound note.

While I stood dumbfounded, unable to speak, almost to move, he continued: 'You'd better come round to the stage-door, and let me explain to that idiot that you are on the staff.'

When Cerberus had been enlightened, the 'mirror of chivalry,' as Walter Lacy used to call him, ushered me out.

'One moment—permit me,' said he gravely, as he took me by the chin and kissed me. 'Manager's privilege, my dear!' then, with a gracious smile, he lifted his hat, and lounged away into Bow Street. I suppose I ought to have been angry, but I wasn't a bit. What Mrs Grundy would call my wickedness I call my naturalness. I felt flattered, and I am flattered now—now that I am an old woman—to think that once in my life I was kissed by Charles Kemble!

I didn't walk, I ran home, jumped up the four flights of stairs in a gallop. 'Carrie, Carrie!' I

cried, 'our fortune's made! *He* kissed me! Yes! Charles Kemble kissed me—kissed me, think of that! Fanny Kemble hugged me, and gave me this,' and I flourished my ten-pound note; 'and I'm the happiest girl in the universe, for I'm her understudy at Covent Garden!'

The good news cured Carrie of her megrims. She sprang out of bed like lightning, and oh! what a tea-fight we had in the next half-hour.

There, sir! I've told you an incident of my life never related to any human being before, not even to Charles! You may tell it again when I'm dead and gone, but if you tell it before I'll never forgive you!

Have you had enough, or do you care about any more?'

'*More? Ever so much! More? It's delightful. Go on, go on, please!*'

'Well, of course, I went to the Theatre daily and nightly. Miss Kemble was kind enough to coach me up in Juliet, so that I might be ready in an emergency to take her place; but, unfortunately, I never had the chance.

When ultimately she and her father went to America—where, worse luck! the poor dear became Mrs Butler!—Mr Abbott, and Mr Egerton (another important member of the Covent Garden company) opened the new Victoria Theatre—so called after the Princess Victoria—and, through knowing these gentlemen at the Garden I was engaged at the Victoria, and that was how I came to play Juliet before the Queen!

I suppose you thought me very rude that night, at the 'Vick.' Well, the fact is, I was awfully upset. To begin with, I left the dear old place a Palace, and found it—a pig-sty; and you may imagine what a shock I had when I recognised in that poor lost creature, that dreadful demon barber, my Romeo of forty years ago!'

'*Really!*'

'When we first met he was the beau ideal of the part, elegant, handsome, accomplished, a gentleman from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. He loved me, too,—loved me very dearly,—loved me far more than I loved him.

We were both miserably poor: he had a widowed mother to support, and I had Carrie to look after, so when Abbott and Egerton retired, poor Bob obtained an engagement in Edinburgh; while I was glad to get in anywhere to earn a crust and a frock.

Well, he went one way, I went another, and we never met again till that awful night! When he lost me the poor soul took to drink, and would have gone straight down to the pit if *she* hadn't come to the rescue. She's a charming creature, and you must see what you can do for her. But, dear! dear! I've almost got to the end of my story before I've begun it.

Although fate was so unkind to me, at this very time Carrie met her Prince Charming, a clever young Scotsman, who ultimately blossomed into a meenister of the Kirk, and she became the Lady Bountiful of the Manse of K——, whilst I was left to fight the battle of life single-handed.

I had two or three short engagements at Margate and Worthing, where, by-the-by, I met your friend Phelps, and returned to town to try to get a berth for the winter.

I had barely got back to my old diggin's in Guildford Street, when, to my astonishment—I may say, to my delight—Mr Seymour was announced!

He had just returned from South America, and had been very successful in something which I couldn't quite understand, connected with a quicksilver mine.

He was more attentive and more obliging than ever. He took me out to dinner daily and to the theatre nightly, and in my loneliness he was a link with Carrie, with Vercoza, and the dear old Dad.

Finding that I could get nothing to do in town, and learning that Macready was going to Dublin

to begin the season with Calcraft, with my usual audacity I went boldly to Cambridge Terrace and sent in my card to 'the great Mac.' You remember him?'

'*Perfectly!*'

'Well, then, you know, he wasn't handsome, had the most nondescript nose, the squarest jowls, the bluest-black scrubbing-brush of a beard; but you must also know he had the most gracious, winning, dignified manner it is possible to conceive.'

'*He had! he had!*'

'I explained my business, told him I had played Juliet at the 'Vick,' that Fanny Kemble had coached me, incidentally mentioned that I came from Bath. Fortunately, He also remembered Father, promised to exert his influence to obtain me an engagement—kept his word, and actually offered to escort me to Dublin.

When Mr Seymour heard this, he warned me to be careful, alleging that 'Mac' was a dangerous person. I retorted that I was seventeen and quite capable of taking care of myself.

'You are so young and don't understand,' persisted Seymour, 'and, if you'll permit me, *I'll* escort you.'

'Thanks,' I replied, I fear somewhat ungraciously, 'I've already accepted Mr Macready's invitation. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye. *Bon voyage*, and great good luck!' said Seymour, curtly, as he coldly bowed himself out.

Macready met me at Euston Square, put me in a ladies' compartment, tucked my rugs carefully round me, and gave me a book in a green cover (a number of 'Pickwick,' I think). My companions were two spiteful old tabbies, who barked and wheezed, took snuff, and talked scandal all the way. I wished them at the bottom of the sea, and I wished—yes, I *did* wish—that Mac had been there instead!

When we got to Holyhead he looked after my luggage, got me aboard the packet, stood me lunch

and champagne, and gave me in charge of the stewardess. I got over without turning a hair. When we reached Dublin the dear thing packed me and my luggage on to a jaunting-car, escorted me to lodgings which he had secured for me in Queen's Square, bade me 'Good-night,' and——no, sir, he didn't—at least, not then!

I played Desdemona, Ophelia, Virginia, and Aspasia, in 'The Bridal' and got on very well, considering my youth and inexperience.

On his last night Mac sent for me to his dressing-room, talked to me like a father, promised not to lose sight of me, told me to be a good girl, bade me good-bye, and then—yes, then—I'm happy to say He Did! Ah! He was a darling!

After Him came William Farren, who had commenced his career in Dublin, and who now returned to star in his great parts—Sir Peter, Lord Ogleby, Sir Anthony, etc. But the Dublin people didn't seem to care about him: anyhow, they never came to see him.

I played Lady Teazle, Fanny Sterling, Lydia Languish, and sympathised with him about the bad houses. My sympathy quite won his heart, and he promised to use his influence to get me an engagement at the Haymarket, and he—yes, if you only humoured him a bit—was a most courtly old young gentleman!

By-and-by came Charles Kean, to whom I also played Desdemona, Ophelia, and Lady Anne. He was almost as delightful as Macready. Yes, he was a Prince, but Mac was a King—ay, every inch a King!

I used to ask Charlie to come and take tea, but free and easy as I was with him, I should as soon have thought of inviting Cardinal Wiseman or Daniel O'Connell as of asking Macready to take tea in my little back parlour.

I was not always so reticent. In those days I was sometimes a very imp of mischief; indeed, a stupid, practical joke of mine got me my *congé* from Dublin.

Of course I needn't tell you that it was customary for every one to assist in the Witches' music in 'Macbeth,' the choruses in 'Rob Roy,' The Chough and Crow in 'Guy Mannering,' and the music of 'Pizarro.'

Although we had a trained company of principal vocalists, we had all (without exception) to assist in 'Masaniello,' which was done on a very grand scale. We had a detachment of soldiers from the Castle for the military, and a pompous little prig who had seen the Opera at Her Majesty's and pretended to know all about it, volunteered to lead the Lazzaroni in their attack on the Neapolitan troops.

The little wretch was head cook and bottle-washer in the front of the house, and when I met him in the Treasury his usual salutation was: 'Well, and what can I do for you to-day, my lovely little Laura?' to which I invariably responded: 'Nothing, thank you, Mr Hop-o'-my-Thumb!'

Having only a pair of apologies for legs, the creature had recourse to art to supply the deficiency, and when he appeared in the Green-room with his bandy shins and Brobdignagian calves, which put to shame his Lilliputian body, he was the most grotesque object ever seen outside a waxwork show.

Strutting on the stage flourishing a dragoon's sabre as big as himself, he led his Lazzaroni to the charge and overthrew the military (all of whom were six-footers), and when he sprang triumphant to the central eminence, as who should say, 'Alone I did it!' the effect was ludicrous beyond description.

As he stood there like Ajax defying the lightning and the act drop descended a mischievous idea occurred to me.

My hair came down to my heels in those days, and I had to tuck it up with a huge pair of pins attached to each other by a gold chain and a pair of ornamental knobs as red and as big as strawberries.

The temptation was irresistible; so, plucking the pins out of my hair, I deftly stuck them into

Tappertit's calves, just as the curtain rose for the recall.

When the gods caught sight of these ornamental appendages, one of them inquired: 'Docthor, dear docthor, have your calves gone to grass in a jeweller's shop?'

At the enquiry 'the doctor' indignantly darted forward, his legs became entangled, and down he tumbled on his nose. To make matters worse he fell outside the curtain, and when he arose, struggling to get off, there arose a succession of yells which might have been heard at Clontarf.

'*That was a cruel joke!*'

'I suppose it was; but really, I couldn't resist it.'

'*His legs were his misfortune not his fault.*'

'But they were so funny!'

'*To you—but not to him.*'

'I'm not so sure about that. Anyhow he'd the best of it at the finish. That joke cost me my engagement.'

'*And made you an enemy for life. I've heard the 'doctor' tell the story. He has never forgiven you—and never will!*'

'I know! I've tried to mollify him more than once, but the hateful little beast is inexorable.

Well, from Dublin I went to your precious York circuit, where I met your friend Gustavus Brooke, dear, good-looking, blundering, lovable Gussy.

I was still a girl—so, girl and boy (he wore a jacket then and a collar like an Eton boy), we used to go out together blackberrying, and stuff the ripe fruit into each other's mouths. He was desperately 'gone' on me and I was near falling in love with him; but there was a mother and sister who asserted a proprietory right, and, as I should have wanted him all to myself, that little affair fell through, and I went to Scotland to see how Carrie was getting on. I found her and her Prince Charming very happy, but a little of the Manse went a long way with me, and I was impatient to get back to town, for it was

time to be looking out for an engagement for the ensuing season.

During my absence I had kept in touch with Seymour, sent him an occasional newspaper with a notice or a play-bill, and when I sent word I was coming back, he met me at Euston Square. As we drove along he told me he thought it desirable for me to be in the centre to look after my engagements, so he had taken rooms for me exactly opposite Drury Lane Theatre; in fact, the very identical rooms occupied by Harriet Mellon when old Coutts the banker used to come and take tea with her.

'Well, then, you shall come and take tea with me now,' said I.

'Delighted!' he replied.

We had not met for a long time, and, as he was anxious to know what I had been doing, how I got on, etc., the evening passed pleasantly and quickly.

On the morrow I began to look out for an engagement. William Farren tried to get an opening for me at the Haymarket, but with Helen Faucit, Mary Huddart, Ellen Tree, Louisa Nisbett, and Priscilla Horton, they didn't want poor little me!

Charles Kean was going to open at the Lane with 'Richard the Third,' so I dropped a line asking him to come and take tea.

He came that very afternoon, when without circumlocution I asked him to get me in for Lady Anne. He tried to the best of his ability, but couldn't manage it, the part being already in possession.

He used to give me a look in, nearly every morning, and brought me a bushel of orders for his opening night.

The day before his *début*, a porter came round from Covent Garden with a huge basket of fruit and flowers and laurels, with Charley's compliments, and when he came in the afternoon we ate the fruit, and he asked me to get the flowers and the laurels made up into bouquets and wreaths, and to come and 'give a hand.'

He was a dear, kind fellow, so, of course, I got two or three friends to help me in pelting him with roses and laurel wreaths; in fact, we made him an ovation.

Seymour, who accompanied me, remarked rather grimly: 'Pelting a man with flowers doesn't appeal to me. As a matter of taste, I should prefer to pelt a woman, especially if that woman happened to be you, Laura!'

Yes! he called me Laura! It was the first time he ever did so, and that set me thinking.

He had been my only friend and acquaintance when, but a girl of fourteen, I was alone, literally alone, in London!

You, who have been through that ordeal, know the depth of desolation which it means.

For free and easy, undiluted selfishness, commend me to a woman. Oh yes, I admit it, though I am a woman myself! We take all the help, all the sympathy we can get, from a man who happens to be a man and not a scoundrel, but when it comes to——!' But I needn't tell *you*, sir—I'll go bail you know all about it!

Well, poor Seymour was old enough to be my father, consequently it had never once occurred to me that he ever could dream of being anything more than my slave and servant, to fetch and carry at my beck and call! I am a peculiar person, and have never met my 'affinity,' as the Doctor calls a sweetheart. If I had, I should have been furiously, madly in love, desperately jealous, and, consequently, deplorably unhappy. Had I seen my man looking at another woman I should have killed them both there and then, and so, fortunately, I never did meet my 'affinity'—fortunately for him, and still more fortunately for the 'other woman.'

I had been out of an engagement for some months, and had reached my last shilling, and knew not where to turn, when one day Mr Seymour turned up and, in great embarrassment, informed me

that he had taken the liberty to open an account for me at Coutts' bank for £1000! Placing a pass-book on the table, with the amount duly entered to my credit, he told me to go and get a cheque-book, and write my signature in the bank-book. When he had blurted this out he 'bolted' before I could reply. After that I didn't see him for a fortnight.

I tried hard to keep from breaking into that money, but I was in arrears at my lodgings, and owed a milliner's bill which could no longer be put off; besides, I had a robust appetite, and hadn't learnt to live without eating! There was no help for it; so down I went to Coutts, saw the manager, who was very gracious, and when I told him I lived in the rooms formerly occupied by Harriet Mellon he became much interested, for he remembered her, both as Mrs Coutts and Duchess of St Albans. He had the book brought into his own room, told me where to sign my name, gave me a cheque-book, rang the bell for the porter to call me a cab, and wished me 'good morning.'

After all, it was pleasant to be able to sign a cheque once more, so I paid my arrears and my milliner's bill.

Another week and another — still no sign of Seymour. My heart smote me. I took a cab and drove to his 'diggins' (a swell place in St James's), and found the poor fellow prostrate with fever, and disposed to be delirious. What could a woman with a woman's heart in her body do?'

'*Why, nurse him, to be sure!*'

'That's exactly what I did. The doctor prescribed change of air, so, as soon as my poor patient was fit to be moved, I took him down to Brighton and trundled him about in a bath-chair on the parade.

Just as he was getting better, I had an offer for Braham's new theatre in St James's.

Ever heard John Braham sing?'

'*Yes; twice or thrice before he retired.*'

'You should have heard him when *I* did. Mario, Guiglini, Sims Reeves, were not 'in it' with him. *I* heard him in 'Waft her, angels, gently' in 'Jephthah,' in 'The Echo Duet' in 'Guy Mannering,' 'The Bay of Biscay,' and 'The Death of Nelson!' There never was anything like it—never will be again.

He'd made a heap of money by his voice, but ultimately lost it all in bricks and mortar.'

'*Before his time, like the rest of us!*'

'He had large, speculative ideas; so, not content with building the St James's, he must needs erect that wilderness, the Coliseum in Regent's Park, with the intention of working both establishments with the same forces. We had a pretty good company. John Webster, Alfred Wigan (who then called himself Sidney), Wright, that spiteful cat Fanny Stirling, myself, and I don't know how many others.

When we had finished at one place we slipped into a coach, which was waiting at the door, to whisk us off to the other.

During the time I was with the old gentleman I became acquainted with all his family. The Countess was most kind, the old boy was like a father, and the three other boys—Gus, Hamilton, and Ward—were like brothers to me. It was quite a little family party.

At the end of the season at the St James's, Macready got me a berth at the Haymarket. It was not a very good one, but he advised me to take it and promised to do the best he could for me.

The great feature of his engagement was 'The Bridal,' a play, which, I dare say you know, he and Sheridan Knowles between them, had adapted from Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Maid's Tragedy.'

Mac had already tried it in Dublin, where he had made a great mark in Melantius, and I had been more fortunate in Aspasia than in any other character I attempted.

When the cast was put up, to my great grief I found that Miss Taylor (afterwards Mrs Walter

Lacy), was in for my part, and I was left in the cold. I went to Mac and bewailed my hard fate; he was very sympathetic, and assured me that he would get me an opportunity of playing the part for a night or two at anyrate, and advised me to go and see about my boy's dress so as to be prepared at a moment's notice.

Buoyed up by this assurance, off I went to the wardrobe-keeper, who threw all kinds of difficulties in my way, and at last produced a filthy old rag that would have disgraced a show at a fair."

'It's the original Zamora dress,' said he. 'Take it or leave it, miss— all's one to me.'

'I did take it, and went straight to Macready's room. There were three strange gentlemen there, and I felt *de trop*, but, as usual, Mac was most gracious.

'Come in, little—er—woman,' he said. 'Allow me to introduce three—er—friends of mine. Mr Forster, Mr Maclise, and—er—Mr Charles Dickens. This is Miss Alison, a protégée of mine from—er—Dublin.'

'For once my audacity deserted me, and I felt as if I must sink through the floor.

'Why, what in the name of—er—fate have you got—er—there?' he inquired, as he caught sight of the Zamora rag.

'Oh, please, sir, it is—no—no—I—didn't know, I never thought——'

'Nonsense! Let's have a peep,' and he caught hold of the wretched thing and held it up at arms length between his finger and thumb.

'Gracious—er—God! What's this?'

'My Aspasia dress, sir.'

'His disgust, my aversion, and the horrid thing itself, evidently tickled the fancy of the visitors, for they burst into uncontrollable laughter—so did he. As for me, I burst out crying. 'Do you think I could go on in a thing like that, sir?' I gasped.

'Certainly not, child. Here, Lander, take this — er — er — to the — er —wardrobe and tell the

rascally tailor to send it to — er — Vinegar Yard! Maclise, Miss Alison has to be a—er—boy in 'The Bridal.' Can't we manage something better for her than that infernal—er—thing?'

'I should think so, indeed. Lend me a pencil and a sheet of paper. Allow me, Miss—Miss——'

'Alison, sir.'

Then the great painter made a rapid sketch, took some notes about colours and combinations, promising to send Macready the complete design by mid-day on the morrow.

Next night he sent for me to his room, where the wardrobe-keeper was awaiting me, subdued and chapfallen.

'Here is your costume—er— my dear,' said Mac, showing me the loveliest design in blue, and white and gold.

'Now measure Miss — er — Alison, sir. Let it be tried on to-morrow night, and let me see it before it is—er—made up.'

Next night I dressed in my own room, 'put 'em—ahem!—on,' wrapped myself up in my cloak, and went round to Macready at the end of 'Ion,'

'Gracious—er—God!' he growled, 'you are as broad as you are—er—long! Do you understand you are—er—a boy—do you hear?—a—er—boy, not a tub! And—er—stays, too—stays! Is the child mad? Go behind the—er—screen yonder and take 'em off! Take 'em off directly! That'll do! Now you look like a Christian!' Then, addressing the costumier, who awaited orders—'Observe!—I don't want the skirt down to the heels—no, sir, nor —er—up to the hips!

This girl is a boy, sir. No, no!—you know what I mean. Now, a boy has legs. Good God! what is the idiot laughing at? There is nothing to laugh at in a—er—leg, but everything to admire. It's the most beautiful piece of mechanism on—er— God's earth, and it is a—er—profanation to—er— spoil it.

The skirt must descend to within an inch of

the—er—knee. Do you hear me, sir? Within an inch of the—er—patella!

And—ahem! Miss Alison, no feminine nonsense about your hair. Of course it ought to be—er—cropped, but that would be—er—sacrilege; so let it tumble down about your—er—shoulders, and leave it free to sink or swell, as—er—nature pleases.

Now, sir, you have your—er—instructions? Very well, then. Put the dress down to—er—me! Allow me, little woman,' and he slipped the cloak over me. 'Good God! what an ass I am becoming! I forgot the—er—thingamys behind the screen. There, there, I am not looking! Good-night! Mind, I rely—yes, I rely on—er—you!'

After all these years I recall with gratitude that, thanks to Mac's good offices, I got my chance and made the most of it.

"I have that dress now. It wears better than I do. No wonder! for it hasn't had so much knocking about, and I keep it wrapped up in tissue paper. Sometimes I take it out to have a look at it, and then I think, yes I *do* think I was worth looking at in those days!

Anyhow, Charles Reade thought so when he first saw me in that dress, and the impression served to keep my memory green for fifteen years; a long time for a man, especially that man, to remember!

During the run of 'The Bridal' I was fortunate enough to interest an enterprising American manager, who proposed a trip to the States. I consulted Seymour, who advised its acceptance. I asked him to take the matter in hand, and gave him *carte-blanche* to make arrangements. He was a thorough man of business, had been in America, and got me five times as much as I could have got for myself.

As the time approached for my departure he absented himself for a whole month. I was afraid a relapse had occurred, so I called at his rooms. The landlady and I had got on terms of friendly intimacy during his illness, and she let the cat out

of the bag. He had had an awful run of luck on the Stock Exchange, and was a ruined man! He had given up his swell rooms and was living in a garret in the mews at the back. I waited to hear no more, but hurried out, hurried in, and demanded, nay, insisted on being shown to him. I found him dreadfully depressed, bullied him, soothed him, proposed to him, married him next morning at a registry office, and we sailed to America a week later!"

'*You loved him then, after all?*'

'Not a bit! No more than I love you! We were comrades, that was all. He had been a right down good friend to me when I was in trouble; he was in trouble now, and how could I leave him high and dry in his misfortune?

Thanks to his industry and sagacity, more than to my ability, we made a heap of money in America.

At one time I had almost grown to love him —that was when my baby was born; and had she lived, perhaps I might—— but when she was taken from me, and when the doctors forbade me ever to hope that another could come to take the place of the treasure I had lost, I was tempted to repeat Vercoza's sublime blasphemy!

You cannot realise what a childless mother feels when she sees in every other street some dirty drunken drab of the gutter, with perchance half-a-dozen half-clad starvelings clinging to her skirts, and following her down to perdition, while she, poor soul, is condemned to—but there! there! what is the use of speaking to a man of something he cannot comprehend?

There is another thing a man can't comprehend: he can never realise that it is possible for men and women to be friends and comrades and nothing more. You know how Charles Reade and I first became acquainted?

'*Yes.*'

'Well, my husband and I always hated lodgings, so when we returned from America we took a house in Jermyn Street.

We had made money in the States and didn't want to lose it, so we concluded if we could meet two or three agreeable people we would get them to share with us in housekeeping. Seymour brought in Captain Curling, who was an old chum of his. I introduced Augustus Braham, who was an old friend of mine. Then came Charles Reade. Each contributed his quota to the household expenses, and for a considerable time we formed a united and happy family.

After a year or two, however, the Countess got Gussy a Government appointment at Portsmouth, and that was the first gap in our little family circle.

After another year or two Seymour died. Dear old chap, 'he was wery good to me, he was!' as the boy says in "Bleak House."

At his death I remained and kept house for Reade and Curling until he also took it into his head to follow my poor Seymour, and Reade and I were left alone.

Then Carrie and her husband came immediately to town. He talked to me like a father and a 'Meenister of the Kirk.' 'If you continue to reside under the same roof alone with a single man, especially as that man happens to be a novelist and a writer of profane stage plays,' said he, ''twill create scandal!' Carrie reminded me that she was 'my only living relative, that my room was ready at the manse, and that I should there find a peaceful retreat from the dissipations of the wicked world.'

I was silenced though not convinced, but 'blood is thicker than water' after all, so I made up my gigantic mind to retire to Scotland as soon as I could get my traps ready.

There was a great deal to be seen to: furniture, linen, pictures, and plate to be disposed of. The 'Meenister' undertook to arrange with Reade while Carrie and I went to see the agent to get the house off my hands.

It was the end of the season and a bad time, he told us, but he'd do his best.

"When we returned the Meenister, with great complacency, told us he'd settled everything with the Doctor.

'What did he say?' I inquired.

'Nothing! Save to inquire when I thought you were likely to be going. I told him in about a month, and that, as I'd some business in town, touching those stocks and shares of mine, we were going to stay and help you.'

'By all means, serve God and Mammon at the same time, it's the best game going!' growled the Doctor, rushing upstairs, and coming down in about ten minutes, lugging that huge portmanteau of his after him, hailed a four-wheeler, and drove off without another word.'

'And left no message for me?'

'Not a syllable.'

'That's strange,' said I.

'He is a strange man, is the Doctor,' replied the 'Meenister.'

And he was right. Charles Reade is a strange man—a very strange man!

A week, a fortnight, three weeks elapsed, and we neither saw nor heard of him.

Meanwhile our preparations were nearly completed. An eligible tenant had proposed for the remainder of the lease; if his references were satisfactory the matter could be settled at once. We had selected such things as were desirable for my room at the manse. A broker had appraised the remainder of the goods and made me an offer—a very bad one, so bad that I declined it and determined to store the things rather than accept it. When the inventory was taken, we found a lot of Reade's things—half-a-dozen fiddles, a bundle of manuscripts, hundreds of books, a huge, lumbering writing-desk, a chest of drawers, heaps of linen and clothing, some *bric-à-brac*, three or four pictures, an armchair, etc. What to do with all this rubbish I hadn't the faintest idea."

'Suppose we send them to Oxford or Ipsden,' suggested Carrie.

'Better ascertain whether he is there first,' I replied.

'Right,' replied the 'Meenister,' and he wired to Oxford, but there was no answer. Then he wired to Ipsden, no answer from there. Next he wired to the Hotel de Lille et D'Albion; still no answer. At last it occurred to me as an inspiration to try the Garrick.

No information could be obtained there, save that if a letter were left it would be forwarded immediately, so a note was written explaining the state of affairs, and left at the Club.

I had begun to be irritated at this long-continued absence and this obstinate silence.

I had nursed Reade through a dangerous illness and had been very thoughtful in a hundred ways in which a woman can be helpful to a lonely man.

That he should so easily forget hurt me deeply.

It was now Wednesday; next day the lease would be transferred, the day after, the furniture for my room would be on the way to Scotland, the rest stored—and then?

Carrie and the 'Meenister' went out shopping in Regent Street, and I was left alone to take stock of the situation.

When I came to think it over, the prospect of ending my days at that dreary old Manse—no theatres, no music, no pleasant company—did not appear very alluring, and I began to feel angered with the 'Meenister,' and his wife, and still more angered with Reade.

I was no longer young. It was too late now to form new friends, new associations; our pleasant Bohemian ways were to be superseded by this small narrow life, this sordid routine of a Scottish Manse.

I'd read or heard of a book call 'Mosses from an Old Manse,' and I kept repeating the words to

myself till I found myself muttering: 'I suppose I shall grow Mossy too!'

Anger got the better of me. I started to my feet, exclaiming aloud: 'Ungrateful, barbarous creature, to go away without even a good-bye!'

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when *He* rushed into the room—unkempt, unshorn, ghastly pale, his eyes starting out of his head—more like a raving maniac than the sedate Vice-President of Maudlen.

'Have you taken leave of your senses, Laura, or do you want to drive me out of mine, that you persist in this folly?' he burst out.

'For years, years, years, we have been friends, comrades, brother and sister, and now to cast me aside like an old glove! It's abominable!

'The world!' said I. 'The Minister!'

'Blank the hypocritical world! Blank your sanctimonious Minister! Blank everything and everybody! What have they to do with our happiness?'

'Then he poured forth a flood of violent invective and passionate entreaty that carried everything before it.

'Enough, enough!' I replied. 'I *won't* go. But *you* must! Go away before *they* return. You're not fit to talk with them nor anyone now. Not even fit to be seen. Go to the barber's first and get shaved!'

'I will never get shaved again.'

(And he never did, for from that time forth he cultivated a beard!)

'Well, at anyrate, away you go and take a hot bath and a plate of soup!'

'Bah! I hate soup!'

'Then get outside a porter steak and a small bottle, and go down to Ipsden for a week, and everything shall be as it used to be by the time you come back.'

'You pledge me your word on that?'

'I've said it, so good-bye——'

'No, not good-bye—*au revoir*—you understand.'

'Oh yes, I understand enough French for that.'

'Till this day week then.'

'This day week.'

Quite a load was taken off my mind, and I began to unpack directly.

Both Carrie and the Meenister were astonished when I told them I had altered my mind. I had some difficulty in convincing them, but I *did* convince them at last, and we've been the best of friends ever since!

Every summer they come to me for a fortnight and sometimes I go back with them for a holiday, and last summer we went to Germany together.

As for *our* positions — *His* and *mine* — we are partners, nothing more. He has his banking account and I have mine.

He is master of his Fellowship and his rooms at Oxford, and I am Mistress of this house, but not *His* Mistress!—oh dear no! not exactly!

Had we met when we were boy and girl I might — nay, more, I would — have sacrificed myself to have saved him from pauperdom, but, fortunately, we didn't meet till I had a husband to protect me; and though I didn't love poor Seymour after your hot-blooded Irish fashion, his honour was sacred as my own.

When He died and Curling died, and when we two eccentric, but sensible, middle-aged people were left alone in the world, we resolved to be friends and comrades always, but lovers—never!

So now you know all! It's been on my mind to tell you ever since that night at the 'Vick.' By-the-by, I've not forgotten what you lent me then. Here it is. At first I was riled at your dragging me there. I've been glad of it ever since because it has enabled me to help that poor soul.

Charles has promised to see after her when — when—I—I— But enough, and more than enough about myself. So you're going on tour again?"

'*Yes.*'

'How I envy you your vitality. When do you begin?'

'*Monday, at Glasgow.*'

'How long are you out?'

'*Six months.*'

'Then before you've reached the end of *your* journey I shall have reached the end of mine.'

'*The end?*'

'Yes, it's coming; and, after all, what does it signify,—'The readiness is all.'

'I'm only sorry for *Him.* Poor old boy! *He'll* be very lonely when I'm gone. I sha'n't be here when you come back, but mind you come and see *Him.* He likes you, and *He* doesn't like every one. And don't you forget me!

Oh, dear! oh, dear! I am so tired. Generally you do the chattering—but I've had it all my own way to-night. Ah, well! it's my last chance, and I've made the most of it. It's getting late—so I must turn you out! Good-bye!

'*No, no—not that!*'

'Yes, that—and this! God bless you, old friend! Yet again! God bless you, for the last time.'

The last time! Could it be the last time? That was the question I asked myself all the way down to the bleak and barren North.

CHAPTER II

END OF THE JOURNEY

A Prolonged Parenthesis—(A Letter from John Hollingshead—Another from Charles Reade—"Practical John" tells the Story of the Genesis of "Drink")—End of the Journey

Reade's reply to my enquiries about 'L'Assommoir awaited my arrival in Glasgow. In it he reminded me how often he had been baffled and defeated in the Theatre, assured me that he was once more in sight of port, and implored me, in the name of our old friendship, not to cross him in the ambition of his life. I could not withstand this appeal, and my unfortunate piece disappeared into the waste-paper basket.

It will be remembered that in the preceding chapter Egeria referred to the part taken by my friend John Hollingshead in instigating Reade to acquire and adapt Zola's play.

Mentioning the circumstance the other day to the genial John he was kind enough to promise to furnish me with a brief account of the production, and here it is:

"My Dear John Coleman,—Here are the plums promised for your pudding:

A. A characteristic letter from our old friend to yours truly.

B. A full, true, and particular account of the production of 'Drink.'

C. A bit of sugar for the bird (yourself!).—Always yours,

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD."

A.

August 20th, 1874.

'DEAR HOLLINGSHEAD, — I want you to give me half-an-hour to talk about plays. I have by me at this time such a number of masterpieces, great and small, as I think no writer of reputation ever yet kept by him without finding a market. I will give you a list, with a comment or two.

No. 1. *Our Seaman.* A grand drama of incident by sea and land, hitherto played in the country as 'Foul Play,' and always with great effect. Copy sent herewith.

No. 2. *Two Loves and a Life.* This is a great drama of incident and character, and there is some of Taylor's (Tom's) best work in it, and some of mine. It deals with incidents of the Rebellion of 1745, and 'Clancarty' is not a patch upon it. Was never run out in London. Shelved by Webster. Has not been performed for many years here, and I have recently repurchased the sole right from Webster.

No. 3. *Masks and Faces.* Shelved this twenty years by Webster, and never played in the country except for benefits—that is to say, in the vilest and most slovenly way. This comedy rehearsed by me, and made sharp and effective in all the parts, is a sure success at a comedy theatre, the cast being sufficient. Recently repurchased from Webster. *It is never too late to mend.* Remodelled, and the female interest strengthened—a sure card at a big theatre—the Princess's first.

No. 4. *Dora.* A poetical pastoral, in which the scenery is very important because it plays a part in the story. A drunken scene-painter hurt us at the Adelphi, but over the water (America) it proved a prodigious success. This piece I myself have shelved

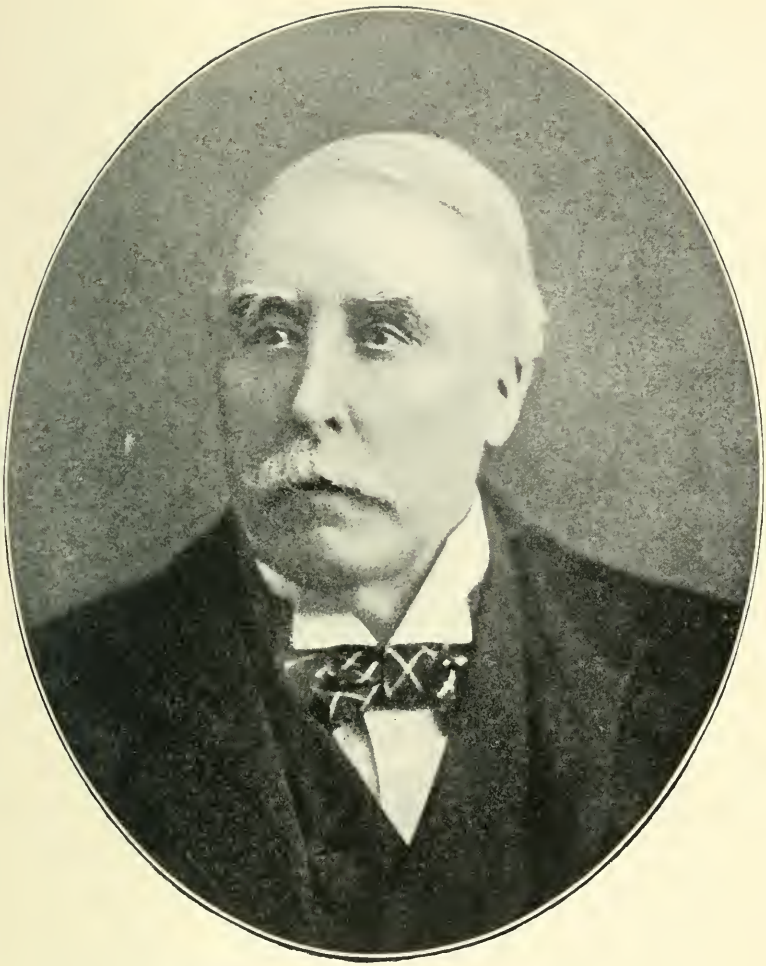

Photo by W. & D. Downey]

JOHN HOLLINGSHEAD

for want of an actor and an actress, but I have now got them—Ellen Terry and John Ryder.

No. 5. Rachel the Reaper. A powerful drama. Two acts. One scene,—which scene I contribute complete. There are strong characters, and as much story and plot as a five-act drama. Plays one hour and twenty minutes only.

No. 6. The Wandering Heir. No scenery to paint. I have it all docked.

No. 7. The Robust Invalid. (An adaptation from Molière.) Miss Farren as Toinette, or Ellen Terry, if in the theatre.

Of short pieces I am the cheapest author going. I only ask a moderate sum nightly.

With large pieces I prefer the big game, like to share after a sum, but then I will always back my big pieces with capital, if required. Will back them at the Gaiety or the Princess's, if you like to venture.

What I must not do at the present time is to go into management.

I have a mountain of other work before me, and to me theatrical management is so absorbing that I should lose many thousand pounds' worth of time if I went into it. Please realise this situation. It is one without a parallel, and well worthy your consideration as a manager superior in intelligence to the old stagers.

If you agree with me that these things are worth talking about, please make an appointment with me, afternoon or evening.

I will only add at present that Ryder has offered to play Farmer Allen for £5 less than his usual terms, so highly does he think of the part, and I believe he would play in 'Two Loves and a Life.' Miss Ellen Terry is also desirous to play the part of Dora.

CHARLES READE.'

This letter, straight and to the point, meant business and led to it.

Soon afterwards I did 'The Courier of Lyons' with Hermann Vezin in the dual characters of Lesurgues and Dubosc q; 'Bobby' Atkins in the horse-dealer low-comedy scoundrel; while Nelly Farren played the boy Joliquet, the part acted by one of the Terrys (Kate or Nelly) with Charles Kean.

Nothing was spared to make this play effective; even real horses for the Lyons Mail being provided.

This was the beginning of a long friendship between me and a double-handed writer, who surpassed both Dickens and Thackeray, both of whom pined for success on the stage, but never obtained it, while Reade was equally successful as a dramatist and as a novelist.

After 'The Courier' we revived 'Masks and Faces,' and ultimately did 'Shilly Shally,' a comedy which Reade derived from Anthony Trollope's novel, 'Ralph the Heir.'

This production caused much bad blood between the authors, and led to a lawsuit for libel with the *Morning Advertiser*, which resulted in Reade's getting a verdict for £200 and costs.

B.

And now to 'come' *not* 'to Hecuba' but to Zola!

I saw 'L'Assommoir' in Paris, at the Porte St Martin Theatre in 1877, and was immensely struck with the piece and the acting. Gil Naza (who afterwards, poor fellow, dried up in a madhouse) was the Coupeau, a powerful performance, and the other parts, notably one played by the comedian Bailly (since dead), were all efficiently rendered.

When I returned to England, with the memory of the piece in my mind, I felt that it ought to be done in London, as at that time our much-licensed Metropolis was more the slave of drink than Paris. (Since then, I am sorry to say, our French friends, Anglo-phobists as they are, have copied this vile

appetite, amongst other bad habits, from the English.) With my impression that the production of 'L'Assommoir' in England would do much good socially, and provide the stage with a strong drama, was associated the belief that Charles Reade was the proper man to adapt it. He was the one author of eminence (with the exception of Bulwer Lytton) who was at one and the same time a competent dramatist and novelist.

I met him (Reade), by accident, one morning at the Garrick. I preached to him; I harangued him. I pointed out, first the merits of the drama, and secondly the worship of Drink in England. I reminded him that more than one-third of our national income was drawn from national drunkenness. I figured Britannia as a bottle-nosed old Jezebel, supported by a flaring gin-shop on one side and an opium den on the other. I figured Paris with its temperate *cafés*, as it was then. I amazed Reade first, and convinced him next. Impressed by my energetic pleading (it was hardly pleading; it was a case of 'No compulsion, only you must') he decided to go and see the piece.

Then began the usual Readean process when preparing to 'cross the Channel.' Telegraphic communication was opened with the harbour-master at Dover. When the sea was like castor-oil Reade would start, not before. The great author was right. The 'Sea is His and He made it'—and He may keep it is the opinion of yours truly.

Ulysses started on his voyage, saw the piece with the original fine cast, bought the 'English rights,' and adapted it.

C.

Now for the 'bit of sugar' for you.

In speaking of stage-managers and stage-management, Reade always maintained that "for getting up anything, from a tragedy to a pantomime, from coaching actors and actresses to drilling supers,

you, and you alone were, without exception, the most——!'

(*No, thanks, dear John, spare my blushes! J.C.*)"

. . . . . .

At a later period Reade informed me that, at this period, the condition of Egeria's health was a perpetual source of anxiety, which made the process of adaptation much more difficult than he had anticipated. When at length the work was completed, and rehearsals commenced, she was no longer at hand to suggest, advise, and assist as hitherto, and he regarded her absence as an omen of ill-luck.

At length, however, all difficulties were surmounted, and the result is thus described by 'practical John.'

'Drink' was produced on Whit Monday, June 1879—the very night on which the *Comédie Francaise* Company appeared at the Gaiety Theatre, then under my management.

I was present during the whole of the performance at the Princess's. I knew what was being done at the Gaiety (I had £20,000 advance booking in hand for the great French Combination!), but I did not know what was going to happen in Oxford Street. Reade, as usual, had backed his piece with a considerable sum of his own money. He reaped his reward. The piece was an enormous and permanent success. I had no pecuniary interest in the matter, and never sought for any; my only object was to serve my friend, who, I am happy to say, cleared upwards of £20,000 by this one piece!

. . . . . .

The very theatre in which Reade had encountered the cruel insults which embittered his life and endangered 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' fifteen years before, was crowded nightly from pit to dome by eager, excited, and enthusiastic multitudes. With their plaudits ringing in his ears, his first thought (so

he assured me) was: 'And *She* is not here to see it, to hear it, to share it with me!'

When he reached home *She* forgot for a moment, a little moment, her agonies of pain in the recital of his triumph.

If *She* could only have been there!

In his diary, at that date, he states:

'Two great successes at the Princess's Theatre, 'Never too Late to Mend' and 'Drink,' have improved my fortune, but I really think have added to my grief — especially since my darling cannot enjoy my triumph for pain and suffering.'

While our generous, large-hearted Egeria was suffering indescribable agonies, struggling 'twixt life and death, the Theatre was still crowded and money was turned from the doors.

It was amidst this triumph, so long deferred, that the blow fell which left Him a desolate, broken man.

When the news reached me I was hundreds of miles away, but there is a communication lying before me now, in which, after recording the continued success of the new play, he refers to the struggles of his youth, the vicissitudes of his manhood, his repeated failures, his frequent disappointments in the Theatre. 'And now,' he continues, 'now that I am rich and prosperous, now . . .'

'The emptiest things reverberate most sound,' and my heart is too full for words.

There is, however, an epitaph on a tomb in Willesden churchyard, which will tell the remainder of the story better than I could tell it were I even to attempt it.

I quote the inscription without comment.

"Here lies the great heart of Laura Seymour, a brilliant artist, a humble Christian, a charitable woman, a loving daughter, sister, and friend, who lived for others from her childhood. Tenderly pitiful to all God's creatures, even to some that are frequently destroyed or neglected, she wiped away the tears from many faces, helping the poor with her savings, and the sorrowful with her earnest pity. When the eye saw her it blessed her, for her face was sunshine, her voice was melody, and her heart was sympathy. Truth could say more, and Sorrow pines to enlarge upon her virtues; but this would ill accord with her humility, who justly disclaimed them all, and relied only on the merits of her Redeemer. After months of acute suffering, bowing with gentle resignation, and with sorrow for those who were to lose her, not for herself, she was released from her burden, and fell asleep in Jesus, September 27th, 1879. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Matt. v. 7). This grave was made for her and for himself by Charles Reade, whose wise counsellor, loyal ally, and bosom friend she was for twenty-four years, and who mourns her all his days."

End of Book the Fourth

Book the Fifth

THE WHITE PILGRIM

"Eros, unarm: the long day's task is done,
And we must sleep."

Book the Fifth

THE WHITE PILGRIM

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CHAPTER I

'TWIXT EARTH AND HEAVEN

After many Days—Life at Shepherd's Bush in 1883—Forty Winks after Dinner—A general Illumination—Last Night at Blomfield Terrace—The Book of Job—A theological Disquisition, and a sagacious Conclusion—Two Quotations—A last Look at Albert Gate—The new old Play of "Griffith Gaunt"—Awaiting the Hour—And the Woman—Our last Interview—Reade's Departure for the Riviera

ENGAGED on tour, and rushing from pillar to post, fully twelve months—twelve long, weary months—elapsed before I visited Albert Gate again.

I knew from his letters that Leo was overwhelmed with grief, but I was quite unprepared to find him so utterly broken down.

When we parted he was robust and hilarious; when we met he was reduced to a skeleton, and was taciturn as the grave. His hair had grown quite white, his features haggard and wan, his eyes dim and sunken.

Save for the dogs couched at his feet he was quite alone.

There were no less than three large oil paintings of Egeria spread out before him; one handsomely framed, rested upon an artist's easel, the other two rested on chairs placed at either side.

He was seated before them, his hands clasped together over a walking-stick, his head resting on his hands, his eyes eagerly peering from picture to picture as if in search of something which constantly eluded him.

When I was shown in he regarded me with an eager yet suspicious look as if he failed to recognise

me, but the sound of my voice evidently evoked some memory of the past, and then——Yes, then—but no!

There are some things too sacred for aught save silence!

Unable longer to endure the sight of the home now grown so desolate, he migrated to Shepherd's Bush, where his brother Compton and his family, did all that was humanly possible to alleviate his sorrow.

Time, the great consoler, brought, if not forgetfulness, at least resignation, as is evidenced by the following extracts from his diary:—

'I have lost the one creature who thought more of the interest, health, and happiness of a poor old man of sixty-five than of her own!

. . . . . .

Oh, to think that for five-and-twenty years I was blessed with Laura Seymour, and that now for the rest of my pilgrimage she is quite, quite gone. Not one look from her sweet eyes — not one smile. Oh, my heart! my heart!

. . . . . .

My poor lamb has left me all her savings — my tears stream afresh when I think of it. Every shilling of that sacred money is devoted to God and the poor.

His will be done. I am very wretched; but, once more, His will be done!'

Even in His most despondent moods we found many topics of common interest, and he loved to talk of Her and of old times.

At length he began gradually to resume health and strength. 'His ashes lived again in their wonted fires'; and if he once began to talk of the Theatre he forgot his troubles. Noting this, I induced him to accompany me to the Play two or three times, and we went to Drury Lane to see the Meiningen people, who interested him so much that for days he could talk of nothing else.

A month or two later, with his usual inconsistency, he went to the opposite extreme, and informed me with great *empressement* that he did not intend to write for the Theatre again, and that henceforth he would devote himself entirely to Biblical studies!

At this very time, he related with great gusto a story about the late Sheridan Knowles. In his declining years, especially when he was out-of-sorts, the veteran poet (who was a fine, noble-hearted, but hot-headed and eccentric Irishman) became exceedingly pious. As soon as he got better he changed his views, illustrating in fine form the adage:

> 'The devil was ill, and the devil a monk would be;
> The devil got well, and the devil a monk was he!'

During his fits of despondency he regarded, or affected to regard, the Play-house as the Bottomless Pit of Abomination; but, though he scorned the sin, he did not scorn the wages of it. I don't mean 'Death,' but the fees arising from the representation of his plays. He was 'Death' on them, certainly! And, ill or well, pious or otherwise, woe betide the luckless manager who ventured to do one of Knowles' plays without paying him for it.

At her death, his widow (formerly the beautiful Miss Elphinstone, the actress) bequeathed £1000 each to the Pastors' College (in connection with the Metropolitan Tabernacle), the Midnight Meeting Movement (Red Lion Square), and the Stockwell Orphanage for Boys (Clapham Road); £100 to the minister, deacons, and elders of Ardberg Baptist Chapel (Rothesay, Isle of Bute). Evidently the Tabernacle does not disdain to subsidise the Temple of Satan, nor did the late lamented withdraw the plays from the stage, inasmuch as she bequeathed all the manuscripts and writings, and the interest arising from the acting of the dramas of James Sheridan Knowles, to Mary Knowles Rice.

One morning, many years ago, the two authors

met at the door of Benjamin Webster's house in Brompton. At that period Reade was more famous for his facts than for anything else, and it was well known how hard he worked in getting them up. Knowles was coming out savagely pious because Webster had declined to accept a play of his. Reade was going in with a manuscript under his arm, hoping to succeed in inducing rare old Ben to hear it. In his usual effusive fashion Knowles opened fire with: 'How are you, dear boy? God bless my sowl, how are you, and how have you been this age past? You're the very man I wanted to see! It's no use trying to see him' (indicating Webster). "The owld thief had the impudence to tell me just now that thragedy's a dhrug in the market, and that he's got enough comedies to keep the Haymarket goin' for the next century. How lucky thin is this matin'! I've got a splendid pot-boiler—a commission to write a polemical pamphlet to pitch into the Papists. I'm all right except for the facts. Unfortunately, that's my wake point, but it's your sthrong one; so if you'll do the facts I'll do the slatin', and we'll divide the plunder between us.'

Whether that pamphlet ever saw the light or not I am unable to say; I only know that Reade left the poet to do the "facts" as well as the "slatin'."

When my vacation came to an end, and I had to leave town to fulfil my engagements, Reade again assured me that he had done with the Theatre for ever, and that he would devote the remainder of his life to the Bible, and advised me to follow his example. Nay, more, he urged me to quit the Stage and take to the Church. 'You'd show 'em how the Bible should be read,' said he, 'and if I could only teach you to believe, with your gift of the gab, and your elocution, you'd make a splendid popular preacher!'

He was so much in earnest on this occasion that I was not a little surprised when some few weeks later I received the following communication:—

'Blomfield Villas,
Oct. 16, 1882.

'Dear John,—I was in hopes you would have reported progress from the Channel Isle (Jersey) ere this. . . . Will you now kindly draw on your memory and send me a list of good old short pieces —say forty-five minutes—merry, but interesting, and not all practical jokes and nonsense? I want one for the Adelphi (which I lease from November 18th, for three months to bring out our new drama, 'Love and Money'). I also want a low comedian, young man, and two or three ladies.—Yours always,

'Reade.'

Before I had time to answer this letter there came another to the following effect:—

'Adelphi Theatre,
Oct. 18, 1882.

My dear Joannes,—Put my last in the fire and concentrate your attention on this.

I'm in a hole: in fact I've been in nothing but holes ever since I commenced this infernal collaboration.

The 'story of my woes' must keep till we meet. Suffice it for the present—my collaborator and I are at loggerheads—and my leading man has thrown up his part—the very best I have ever written.

Will you come and play it ('Tis made for *you*!), and show the beggars how it should be done?

Terms no object—that is, if you will stage-manage as well as act—come! and I'll give you *carte blanche*.

Take the next boat. Wire when I may expect you, and I will be here to meet you.—Yours ever,

C. R.

P.S.—Mind! we open in a month, so we haven't a moment to lose!

If we 'strike ile' (and we *shall* if you will only come to the rescue and put your shoulder to the wheel!) we'll do 'Griffith Gaunt' and 'Valjean' after.

I've got a Kate for you. Such a woman! A gorgeous creature!'

Unfortunately at this moment I was bound by contracts with managers in Portsmouth, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Dublin, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, so that, much as I should have liked to have accepted this proposal, I was reluctantly compelled to decline it.

The story of this, his last theatrical speculation, is as strange as any of his preceding experiences.

Mr Henry Pettitt and Mr Paul Merritt—two men, with remarkable aptitude, and equally remarkable antecedents — had been fortunate enough to serve their apprenticeship with Mr George Conquest, the veteran play-wright, of the Grecian Saloon, who was a past-master in constructing a plot or building up a situation. In addition to these qualifications he knew more of the contemporaneous French drama than any man in England.

His system was to provide the scenario of a play, and instruct his colleagues to clothe it in flesh and blood—*i.e.* in fairly brisk dialogue.

Pettitt (so he told me) had been an assistant schoolmaster, a super at the Opera, and (in a small way) an actor.

Merritt introduced himself to me at Hull, and volunteered to write me a play, alleging that he had seen me in all my repertory, and could fit me with something exactly suited to my resources. Upon inquiring where he had seen me, he replied at Leeds; that, in point of fact, he was so ardent an admirer of mine, that he had actually taken a private box every night I acted during the entire season!

Carried away by his ardour, I invited him to dinner. By the time we got through the first bottle he confided to me that his 'private box'

was a front seat in the 'Top Hoel,' as the sixpenny gallery of the Leeds Theatre was called in the vernacular.

He then proceeded to inform me that his mother, a native of Yorkshire, had been some years in Russia, where she married a morganatic offshoot of the Polish Sobieskis's. In consequence of incompatibility of temper, husband and wife separated soon after Paul's birth, and the mother returned to her birthplace with her son.

When he grew up, the boy hungered for a sight of his father, got to know where he was to be found, ran away to Hull, took ship before the mast, was kicked and cuffed about from stem to stern till he reached Odessa, from whence he bolted, tramped half over Russia, found his father, who not only declined to acknowledge him, but consigned him to a much warmer climate than Siberia.

The poor lad had consequently to tramp through the snow to Archangel, and make his way home the best way he could.

He was wont to cite, in proof of his Russian origin, that when he landed at Hull, after a long voyage in a sailing-ship, the first thing he did was to rush off to the market-place, buy a huge cucumber, run up an entry, and chaw it up to the last morsel.

When Augustis Harris took Drury Lane he imported Pettitt and Merritt from 'The Grecian,' and between them they concocted 'The World,' the second act of which, by the way, was an audacious crib from the second act of Reade's 'Foul Play.'

With the aid of a Railway collision, they vamped up the next drama for old Drury. Then their noses were put out of joint by 'The Sailor and his Lass,' by Robert Buchanan, which ran for the whole of Harris's third season.

Temporarily banished the Lane, Pettitt induced Mr Clarence Holt to accept a rough and tumble drama, which, after a trial trip in Birmingham, was produced at the Adelphi, with Mr Warner in the leading part. This gentleman (who was the original

and admirable Coupeau in 'Drink),' suggested to Pettitt a collaboration with Reade. The former jumped at the idea, and Warner broached the subject to the latter, who at first demurred. But when Pettitt, who was as modest as he was ingratiating, submitted a capital Scenario, Reade condescended to collaborate with the young man from the East End.

The Gattis were persuaded to entertain the idea for the Adelphi—that is, if they approved of the play. Pettitt then persuaded French, the publisher, to cable to America that a new drama, by the author of 'Never too Late' and 'Drink,' was to be produced at the Adelphi.

An enterprising New York manager jumped at the bait, and actually planked down £2000 for the rights in the United States!

Then came difficulties. The Gattis refused to accept the play, whereupon the American *impresario* intimated that if it was not produced at the Adelphi he should expect his £2000 back!

In this emergency the authors resolved to produce the play themselves. To this end they rented the theatre from the Gattis for three months.

Then came another obstacle: Warner threw up his part, whereupon, as already stated, Reade appealed to me. As I was unable to come, Pettitt recommended a friend of his.

When this difficulty was obviated, another cropped up. Warner was engaged by the Gattis for the season, and they stipulated that Reade and Pettitt must pay his salary, whether he acted or not.

They had gone too far to recede now, so they consented to accept this additional responsibility, provided Warner would go to Liverpool to act "Drink" for a month so as to ease the London treasury.

One would have thought all was now clear, but lo and behold! when the partners began to discuss the getting up of the play, they agreed to differ as to the amount to be expended, and the difference was so acute that Reade paid Pettitt £500 to with-

draw altogether from the business, so that astute young gentleman retired with a clear £1500 in his pocket, while Reade was left to bear the brunt of the joint speculation in London and Liverpool.

Both turned out disastrous failures!

His appeal to the managers five years before, to give 'Dora' another trial having met with no response, he determined to give it a chance himself, hence he produced it to bolster up 'Love and Money.'

Nothing was left to accident on this occasion with regard to the scenery, which was of the most elaborate, realistic, and perfect character. Miss Sophie Eyre acted Dora, and Mr Charles Warner acted the patriarchal farmer, and, I believe, both distinguished themselves highly. The play was admirably cast in other respects, but it was unfortunately placed. It commenced the evening's performance at seven o'clock, so that, in fact, it was half over, before there was anyone in the house to see it, and Reade ruefully informed me that so far from its production helping the receipts, they continued to dwindle down and down, until both pieces were finally withdrawn. Thus his latest theatrical speculation, and the very last performance of one of his most cherished works, was destined to end in a cruel disappointment!

This final disaster soured his temper and embittered him against the Theatre.

On returning to town at the end of my tour I saw a good deal of him at home, but rarely or ever at the Play-house.

Indeed, the last time I met him in a Theatre was at Drury Lane, the first night of "Freedom," in August 1883. He had just returned from the Continent, was feeble and tired, and left before the play was over. I brought him out and put him into a cab. He wished me to accompany him home, but, unfortunately, I had a lady with me whom I had to pilot to the wilds of Clapham Junction — a circumstance I have regretted ever since, for he seemed to feel rather hurt by my

refusal. This was his last—his very last—appearance in a Theatre.

It was in the natural fitness of things it should take place at old Drury. It was in that Theatre that he saw Macready in 'Macbeth' when he first came to London; it was in that Theatre that 'Gold' was produced; it was there that I had last met him when the Meiningen troop were acting. It was there he saw his first play in London; it was there he saw his last!

Although his health fluctuated, he wrote and worked pretty much as usual. Hence, I thought he was more hypochondriacal than really or seriously ill. Indeed, at this very time, he informed me he had completed a novel, which he revised and left ready for publication.

When the weather was favourable, he would occasionally take an hour or two's drive, or pick himself up for a game of lawn tennis, but he soon became fatigued, and, after dinner, in the very midst of conversation, he would drop off into a stupor of sleep for an hour or two.

Years ago, when we were travelling together, when I had to act at night, it was my invariable custom, after an early dinner, to adjourn to the nearest sofa for my siesta, a pleasant but pernicious habit acquired from long companionship with Charles Mathews, who had always found it indispensable to take forty winks before going to the Theatre. At these times when Reade used to chaff me about my indolence, I replied: 'Ah, it's all very well! but you haven't had a dozen letters to write after a long rehearsal, and you haven't to air yourself before the public for four or five hours to-night; but *I* have.'

Now the venue was changed; it was his turn to sleep, mine to watch and wait. When he awoke he would soon pull himself together and say: 'Ah, John, it's *your* turn to chaff now!'

His eyesight, which had always been weak, got worse and worse. Even when a dozen candles were

alight he would exclaim querulously: 'Dear me! how dark it grows!'

'Alas! The darkness was in his own eyes!'

The last night I was at Blomfield Terrace, previous to his leaving England, he read me a remarkable paper (since published in the *Leisure Hour*) on the Book of Jonah. The subject was handled in his most masterly manner, but in the full flow of his impetuous eloquence we stumbled upon one of his characteristic blotches. It was to this effect:

'Having arrived at this conclusion, we must now go the whole hog or none.'

I made a *moue*.

He stopped and said: 'You don't like the hog, I see.'

'I don't,' I replied.

'Well, it's a strong figure of speech, and it's understanded of the people; but you are right, John, —yes, you are right; it's scarcely scriptural: besides, the Israelites never ate pork, so out it goes!'

On that occasion we discussed, as we had done many a time and oft before, the everlasting problems of life, death, time, and eternity. Years ago he was pronouncedly agnostic; now he hoped with a child's humility.

When I was leaving, after some hours' earnest conversation, he said: 'Well, my boy, when all is said and done, when Tyndal and Huxley have demonstrated to their own satisfaction that protoplasm is the beginning, when Darwin has shown that the great gorilla is the middle, and Mill has proved that annihilation is the end, there yet remains this fact which none of 'em can get over—*there can be nothing more wonderful in our going hence than in our coming here!* Therefore perpend, my son, here are two quotations, both by great authors, Charles Reade and Alexander Pope.

The *first* is this (two lines from your pet part, John):*

* Father Radcliffe, 'Two Loves and a Life.'

'There are on earth but two things which never die: Love, which decays not, and Faith, which binds the soul to heaven.'

The *last* is:

> 'Hope humbly then, on trembling pinions soar;
> Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore!'

'Now, 'mark, learn, and inwardly digest' those two choice morsels: meanwhile, remember Naboth's Vineyard at four to-morrow.'

When I arrived at Albert Gate next day, the blinds were down, and there were bills in the window, 'This House to let. Apply within.'

A wizened old woman opened the door and ushered me into the study—the one so graphically described in 'A Terrible Temptation.' He had not yet come, but was expected momentarily.

I had not been there for three years. How dreary and dismantled it looked! The withered leaves, which had fallen from the trees in the garden, had been blown under the door-sill into the room.

I was awakened out of a brown study by the old caretaker.

'She didn't know, not she! whether it was let or not. She 'oped it was—she 'ad 'ad enough of it, any 'ow. Nobody hever came 'cept 'im, and the less ee came the better. When ee did come, ee allays had the molligrubs. Ee never did nuffin' but go stampin' up and down, a-talkin' to hisself.

She had nobody now 'cept Liza, and she was in service hout Fulham way.

The place was too big for a pore lone ooman, and the sooner she was hout of it the better she'd like it'—and thus grumbling she left me to myself and my sad thoughts.

It was past the time—only a few minutes, 'tis true, but what long minutes they seemed.

The gloom of the grey wintry afternoon was gradually settling down from the gloaming into the mirk. I crept up to the fire. How often had I sat there beside Her! It was there I told

her the story of my boyish struggles and privations. 'Twas there She had told me of her own, and now——!

Thank goodness! a knock at the door, voices, and He—at last!

He had not looked so bright and cheerful for ever so long. Age became him that day—his eyes were sparkling, his cheeks a little flushed—his white beard and silky-white hair gave him a dignified and patriarchal appearance. His dress, too, was singularly striking. He wore a large sealskin coat, sealskin gloves, and his usual sombrero. Round his neck was a large soft muffler of white silk.

'He felt wonderfully better,' he said. 'He was going out to the Riviera to dodge the cruel winter, and when he came back he had made up his mind to produce 'Griffith Gaunt.' He had got a splendid Kate, and had brought the lady with him to introduce her to me.

He had fixed upon the theatre too. The Globe, on which he had obtained an option.

Yes; he thought my alterations splendid, but he couldn't accept them in their entirety, so he would like to have the MS. Would I send it?

He would also like to have the last word, in all but the stage management, which he was content to leave to me.'

Presently the lady came in.

She reminded me 'we had met once before in the coffee-room of an hotel at Derby,' but 'we had not been introduced, you know, and had merely glared at each other.'

'Yes, I remembered. I had seen her act too, at Drury Lane.' I said something civil, and mentally took stock of 'my lady.'

She was a capital actress, and a very fine woman, but Kate Gaunt?—not a bit like her! oh dear, no! Ryder?—yes! a capital Ryder! I had an ideal cast in my mind: Mrs Kendal for Kate, Miss Ellen Terry for Mercy Vint, and our fair friend for Ryder. Our fair friend, however, didn't seem to

see it—remembered she had an important engagement, and left us to continue our conversation.

She never played Kate Gaunt or Ryder either. Strange, however, to say, the next time we met she was in management at a West End theatre, and opened with a play of mine in which she acted the heroine.

The next time after that?

Let me see! 'Twas at a Bal Masqué at Covent Garden, the very last time I ever met Augustus Harris. He had returned from Vienna that very night. We supped together in his room, then strolled down to the promenade together. As he stopped to speak to someone, a Masked Woman in a Carmelite came and took my arm.

We had been in conversation half-an-hour before I recognised the heroine of my last play.

A fortnight later SHE died at Naples!

When it came to 'Good-bye,' the dear old boy, seemed elate and confident; I was sad and disheartened—*not* about the future. It was the *past* which haunted me. He and I might meet again —but She who had been so dear to us both—She?

When he got into the cab for Shepherd's Bush I wished him renewed health and strength and a safe return. He laughed and said: 'My love to Bebba, and don't look so down in the mouth! You're not playing Hamlet now! As for me, I shall take a new lease of life out yonder, among the orange groves, and come back like a giant refreshed — and then, my lad, hey for the Globe and 'Griffith Gaunt'!'

Alas! *L'homme propose et Dieu dispose!*

CHAPTER II

COMING HOME

His last Letter—Life at Cannes—Nostalgia—Home—A last Good-bye—Black Friday, 1884

In sight of the end of what has been a labour of love, I propose to devote a few words, not to the brilliant dramatist, the great author, but to the dear friend, the large-hearted, hot-headed, impetuous, loving, and lovable man—who was brave as a lion and gentle as a lamb, the man who was the 'truest friend and noblest foe' I have ever met.

It is not to be supposed that during all these years, and the many transactions that occurred between us, we did not have our points of departure! We were both very much too human to be infallible.

Others may prefer to dwell upon his foibles. For my part I do not care to note the spots on the sun! It is enough for me that he irradiates the earth with light and life and lifts my soul to heaven.

Were I to tell of the thousand generous and benevolent actions done by this man in silence and in secrecy, I should require another volume. A few instances, however, will suffice.

Of course everyone knows that on the occasion of the famous trial in which the late Hepworth Dixon was concerned, Reade sent him, unasked, a cheque for a thousand guineas; that Dixon did not accept the offer does not diminish Reade's generosity.

Some years ago, when in feeble health, he asked me to go down to see his play of 'Drink' at an

East End theatre. I did, and reported favourably upon the gentleman who played Coupeau. The next day he received a complimentary letter and a "little cheque" from the author.

A few months later a poor actor who had been in Her employment, being in great straits, wrote imploring help in the name of the Dead. He received by return of post a bank-note, merely inscribed, 'A Voice from Willesden churchyard.'

The wife of a famous literary man, then dying, and since dead, wrote to Reade asking the *loan* of a few pounds. She received for answer:

'Madam,—I never *lend* money, except on good security, but please hand the enclosed to your husband.'

The husband opened the letter and found a cheque for thirty pounds, with a hasty scrawl: 'Dear X.,—A dear, dead friend of yours and mine has left a little fund at my disposal.* If she were alive I know she would send you the enclosed; I am, therefore, only carrying out her wishes. I send it upon one condition — that you get down to Margate immediately, and save your life for the sake of your wife, who is an excellent woman.'

A lady with whom we had both been on terms of friendly intimacy in the heyday of her youth and beauty, the widow of a mutual friend—a distinguished actor and manager—'had remarried in haste and repented at leisure.' This haughty and imperious beauty was stricken down with a mortal malady. She wrote one line:

'Dear Charles Reade, — I am ill, dying, in want.'

He was in her miserable garret as soon as the first cab could take him there. Two hours later he had removed her to commodious apartments, placed her under the charge of a Sister of Mercy, and one of the most eminent physicians in London.

* Besides this fund, Mrs Seymour left an endowment of £20 per annum ('The Seymour Dole'), for the benefit of twenty poor widows in the Parish of Willesden.

Though too late to save, it was not too late to soothe her last moments and to surround her with everything which his generous care could provide.

One instance concerns myself. At a critical period I had lost my whole fortune in a disastrous enterprise which left me high and dry without a shilling. I had dined at Albert Gate the night before. Some proud blood which I inherit had fettered my tongue, but he had instinctively divined the truth, and next morning he burst into my room and planked a bag of sovereigns on the table (quite sufficient to enable me to tide over my immediate necessities), exclaiming abruptly: 'I saw you seemed rather *gêné* last night; there, that's something to buy postage-stamps with, and if you need more, there's plenty left where that came from.' And he was gone before I had time to reply.

I could multiply these illustrations of the generosity of that large heart *ad infinitum*, but methinks I have said enough.

Having executed a commission I had undertaken on his behalf I duly advised him thereof. Not hearing in reply, I wrote again, and received the following answer:—

'Hotel Splendide, Cannes,
December 4, 1883.

'My Dear Coleman,—I certainly must have overlooked your last letter somehow, and now write to thank you for your zeal and ability on my behalf.

I shall be happy to receive communications from you with regard to any matter of public or private interest, so please note my address.

My own condition is a sad one. Either I have a cancer in the stomach or bowels, or else a complete loss of digestion. So far as animal food is concerned I have been obliged to resign it entirely, excepting in the form of soup—and soup is to me (as you know of old), little better than hot water. I am making arrangements to have a cow

milked twice a day into my pitcher, and if two quarts of milk and twelve raw eggs per diem will keep an old man alive I may live another year.

This is a delightful place if you keep in the sun, which is quite as warm as the sun of May in England, but it only warms the air where it strikes it. I find it winter in the shady streets, and indeed everywhere after sunset; but there is a great difference between the temperature of this place and Paris, for here are avenues of palm-trees flourishing, not in boxes, but in the bare soil, not very lofty, but with grand and beautiful stems; there are also aloes in bloom, and orange-orchards weighed down with the golden fruit; there are also less pleasant indications of a warm climate; the flies are a perfect pest during meals, and at night I am eaten up with mosquitoes.

Now, what are you doing? Please tell me. I have never been well enough to work on 'Griffith Gaunt,' but I have got your manuscript by me, and fully appreciate and approve your excellent emendations. . . .

The charge for a letter here is now only two-and-a-half pence, and in my solitude and affliction a little gossip from my old friend will be doubly welcome. Write me, as soon as possible, a good long letter. Attack a sheet of foolscap—don't be afraid of it—and, above all, believe me, now and always yours, CHARLES READE.'

In compliance with his request I wrote giving him a full, true, and particular account of all that was going on in town, in Parliament, at the Theatres, etc., and endeavoured to laugh him out of his sad presentiments, quoting the examples of The Pope, Gladstone, Montefiore, etc. After this I wrote three or four times, but the above is the last letter I ever received from him. Knowing how erratic he was in his correspondence, his prolonged silence, though it pained me, gave me no cause for alarm, especially as I had read his letter on the Belt case, published

in the *Daily Telegraph* immediately after the then Lord Chief-Justice had formulated his extraordinary dictum as to the value of Opinion *versus* Fact. In this, Reade's last published utterance, I was delighted to find all his old intellectual vigour, his irresistible logic, his remarkable power of grouping facts and balancing the weight of evidence for and against, all his judicial faculty of *deciding fairly and impartially upon the merits of any case in which he was not himself personally interested!* To my thinking, he had never struck out straighter from the shoulder, never written anything better or stronger. I concluded, therefore, that he was regaining health and strength, and I looked forward to his returning, as he had anticipated, 'like a giant refreshed,' to commence our campaign next season at the Globe with 'Griffith Gaunt.'

Beyond the information contained in the preceding letter, I had no personal knowledge of his doings on the Riviera until a few months later, when I chanced, by mere accident, to meet at the club a popular journalist, who happened to be staying with his wife at Cannes about the beginning of March 1884.

This gentleman informed me that one day, while basking in the sunshine in the garden of the Hotel Splendide, he sought to beguile the time by reading 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' in one of the popular editions, with a sensational illustration on the cover.

Engrossed in the story, he had not noticed a tall, elderly white-haired, white-bearded gentleman, swathed in rugs, who sat near him in a huge wicker arm-chair.

Looking up, their eyes met.

The stranger smiled, as he said in a soft, gentle voice: 'Would you mind reading an old man a chapter of that remarkable-looking book, sir?'

This request was complied with, evidently to the delight of the listener. To the reader's amazement

he learnt that his interlocutor was no other than the author of the story.

Upon calling the following day to pay his respects my friend found Reade lying prostrate on the floor of the room. His head was propped up by pillows, and he literally gasped for breath. For a fortnight or more he suffered tortures from rapid changes of temperature—to-day well, to-morrow ill; but, well or ill, always a martyr to nostalgia.

He grumbled incessantly at the service of the hotel, complaining that he could get nothing to eat, and that he could not have his fire lighted at night—at least, not without a fight for it; while the delicate condition of his lungs rendered a fire in his bedroom not only necessary but absolutely indispensable. He would piteously inquire of his visitor: "Have you any English tea? This 'rot gut' isn't fit to drink! Can your excellent good wife make me an omelette? I think I could eat one after those dainty little fingers."

This lady and another feminine visitor ministered to his wants as well as they could, frequently getting up in the middle of the night to mend his fire or make him a cup of tea.

During those wakeful nights he was very feeble and depressed, and continually troubled with a terrible hacking cough.

When his fair nurses tried to cheer him up he was wont to shake his head and smile sadly, while he replied: "It's very good of you to say so, but I feel—*I know I'm booked for kingdom come!* The doctors have begun to inject morphia, and the beggars never do that until a fellah's at the back of God-speed!"

In these despondent moods he was repeatedly heard to mutter to himself: 'I hope I shall get back to die. I should not like to shuffle off my mortal coil in this beastly hole!'

He had been alone (save for his secretary) through the whole winter. At last, finding himself death-stricken, he summoned his relations to take him

home. They found him almost *in articulo mortis*. When they arrived at Calais the Channel was dreadfully rough. In his best days he had been a martyr to *mal-de-mer*, and had a horror of the sea. It was this alone which had prevented him from accepting numerous invitations to visit America, where he was more popular even than in his own country, and where a royal welcome had awaited him any time for five-and-twenty years.

For nearly a week his departure was delayed by the weather. At last came a lull, of which his friends took advantage. When they commenced to move him, the motion of the carriage caused him intolerable pain; but his nieces walked on either side, holding his hands, and so they soothed him, until at last he consented to be carried on board. Strange to say, he suffered very little during the voyage; but the railway journey to London shook him terribly. When he got to Shepherd's Bush he had just strength to articulate: 'Thank God, I have come home to die.'

His words were prophetic.

It was the second time within two months that the shadow of death had fallen on that hospitable abode. Only a few weeks previous Henry, the son of William Reade, the head of the house, a hale, hearty man of forty—'The Squire,' as they called him down at Ipsden, had been stricken down with a mortal malady, and died in that very room.

It is idle now to think of what might have been, but it is my firm conviction that if, years ago, before functional derangement had set in, Charles Reade had consented to be guided by medical advice, and to take physic (which he always detested), above all, to submit to proper dietetic treatment, he would have lived years longer. It is quite certain that the eminent physicians who attended him during his last illness found that he had been entirely mistaken as to the nature of his disease. There was no indication of cancer in the stomach; but for years he had been suffering from

induration of the liver, and emphysema of the lungs, combined with impaired digestion.

From the moment of his return it was seen to be impossible for him to recover, but all that loving care and kindness could do was done to alleviate his sufferings.

On Sunday, 7th April, I took my last leave of my dear old friend. He was quite unconscious, and but the shadow of his former self. I enquired if he knew me. He pressed my hand gently, but made no answer, and I realised the fact that all hope was past, and that those who loved him best could only pray that the end might come soon—the sooner the better, and I was not surprised when the news of his release came on the following Friday.

I was told afterwards that towards the end he wandered slightly, sometimes spoke in French to imaginary servants who were helping him aboard the boat at Calais; that he called for money to give them. And then at last

'Life lulled itself to sleep, and sleep slept unto death.'

On Tuesday, 15th April 1884, all that was mortal of Charles Reade was buried in Willesden Churchyard. The funeral rites were as unostentatious as his life had been. There were only ten chief mourners —kinsmen and old friends—among whom I was privileged to take a place. Wilkie Collins was peremptorily ordered by his physician to refrain from attending; but he wrote a most touching letter, bewailing the loss of a comrade of forty years' standing. Sir Edwin Arnold, who a few days previously had testified so eloquently in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* to the sterling worth, the nobility of character, and the genius of his former pupil, was also debarred from joining us.

The art of reading the 'Order for the Burial of the Dead' with propriety is an accomplishment which appears to be rarely or ever included among the acquirements of the average clergyman; but on this occasion the inspired words were read so

nobly that they gained an added beauty from their touching and tender utterance by the Vicar of Willesden, who was, I believe, an old friend of the departed.

The morning had been cold and grey, but the moment we left the church the sun shone forth bright and glorious on the masses of flowers which were heaped upon the coffin, on the lid of which was the following inscription:—

"CHARLES READE,

Dramatist, Novelist, and Journalist.

Born June 8, 1814.

Died April 11, 1884."

'Dramatist' first—always first! At his own request the words were thus placed. The ruling passion was strong in death, and to the very last he remained faithful to his first and early love—the Drama.

When he was laid in the grave, as far as my eyes could see through the mist which rose before them, there were present two hundred people, more or less, among whom I could distinguish of men of letters only two—Robert Buchanan and George Augustus Sala; and of actors only two—Stanislaus Calhaem, and Davenport Coleman. They followed him that day to his grave. I have since followed them to theirs.

They do 'manage some things better in France.'

While these lines are passing through the press, comes the news from Paris of the funeral obsequies of one of the authors of 'La Bataille des Dames,' the play which opened the doors of the Theatre to Charles Reade more than half-a-century ago. Yesterday—17th March 1903—M. Ernest Legouvé was accorded a State Funeral. First came magnificent wreaths from the Comédie Française, the Dramatic Authors' Society, the Students' Association, and from the Normal School of Sévres (his native place); next the chief mourners, the family of the deceased, and the Academicians—

Victorien Sardou, Gaston Boissier, Vicomte de Vojüé, and the Comte de Haussonville, representing 'The Immortals.' Then came a deputation from the Theatre Française preceding the Ministers of State—viz., M. Chaumié (Public Instruction); M. Rujon (Fine Arts), and the Representative of the Supreme Head of the Republic, M. Loubet himself, escorted by General Florentin (Military Governor of Paris), and his suite, comprising large detachments of cavalry, artillery, and infantry, with their respective bands. The funeral service was celebrated with all musical honours at Notrê Dame des Victories.

Assuredly, had Charles Reade been a Frenchman, all Paris would have been in mourning, and the people in their thousands would have followed to his last resting-place the man who, from the first moment that he took pen in hand, used it on behalf of the weak, the helpless, the suffering, and the oppressed.

After all, what signifies the absence of a few score authors or actors or the presence of a few thousand spectators? Their absence or their presence troubles him not now. He sleeps none the less soundly beside the faithful heart of his 'wise counsellor, loyal ally, and bosom friend.'

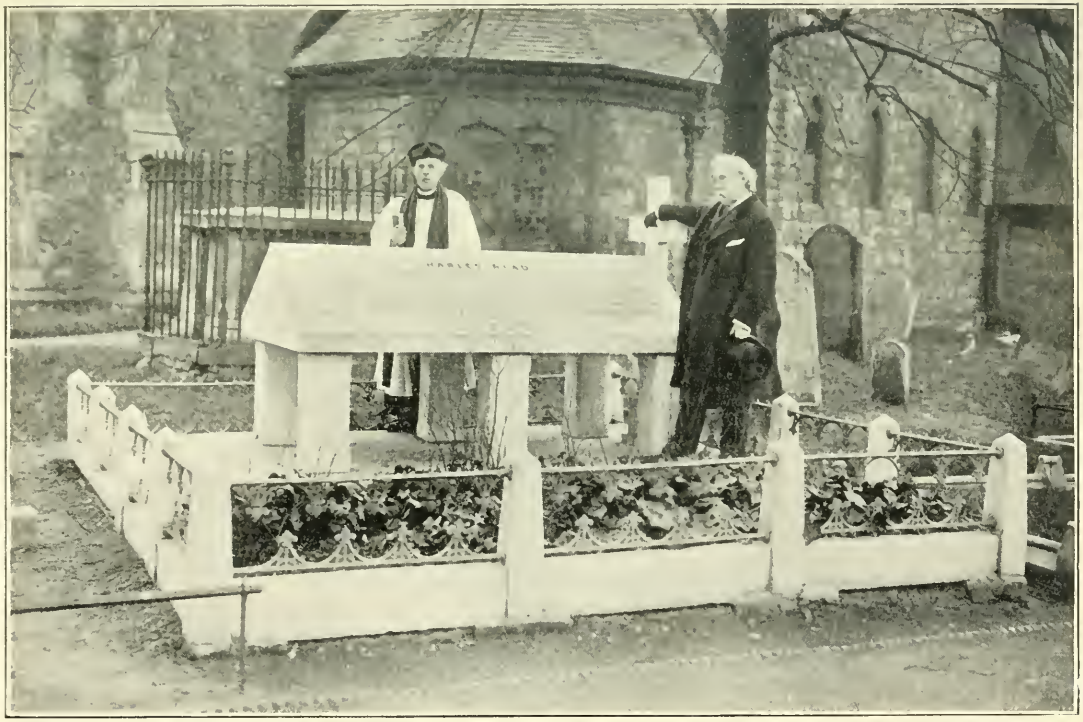

Photo by W. & D. Downey, Ebury Street, Pimlico, S.W.] [*Specially taken for this Work*

READE'S GRAVE

On his tomb these words are inscribed:

Here Lie
By the Side of his Beloved Friend
The Mortal Remains of
CHARLES READE,
Dramatist, Novelist, and Journalist.

His last words to mankind are on this stone.

I hope for a resurrection, not from any power in nature, but from the will of the Lord God Omnipotent, who made nature and me. He created man out of nothing, which nature could not. He can restore men from the dust, which nature cannot. And I hope for holiness and happiness in a future life, not for anything I have said or done in this body, but from the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. He has promised His intercession to all who seek it, and He will not break His word. That intercession, once granted, cannot be rejected; for He is God, and His merits infinite; a man's sins are but human and finite. 'Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.' 'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins."

'Though he be dead, his name will live for ever.'

Yes! So long as Britain remains a Nation, so long as the Stars and Stripes float over the Great country which he loved next to his Island home, so long as the language of Shakespeare and of Milton is spoken in any quarter of the habitable globe, so long will the name of Charles Reade be

'Familiar in men's mouths as household words!'

FINIS

POST SCRIPTUM

THE writer feels bound to acknowledge his indebtedness to Messrs John Hollingshead, Arthur Reade, and the Rev. Compton Reade; also to Messrs Chatto & Windus, Chapman, Hall & Company, and Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft, for much valuable information in connection with this work: but more especially thanks are due to Mr Charles L. Reade, who has kindly prepared the following exhaustive compendium of the author's dramatic and narrative work.

The photographers, one and all, who have graciously permitted the reproduction of unique and scarce photographs are also entitled to the writer's grateful acknowledgments.

EARLY UNACTED PLAYS

(Written before 1851)

1. The Way Things Turn.
2. The Dangerous Path.
3. The Lost Sisters.
4. Marguerite.
5. Lucrezia Borgia (Victor Hugo).
6. A Lady's Oath.
7. Peregrine Pickle.
8. Christie Johnstone.

LATER UNACTED PLAYS

9. Poverty and Pride (Les Pauvres de Paris).
10. Le Faubourg St Germain. Original two-act play. Written in French. Printed in Paris, 1859.

ACTED PLAYS

1. The Ladies' Battle. Scribe and Legouvé. Olympic, 7th May 1851.
2. Angelo (Hugo). Tragedy. Olympic, 11th August 1851.
3. Masks and Faces. With Taylor. Haymarket, 1852.
4. The Lost Husband (La Dame de la Halle). Strand, May 1852.

5. The Village Tale. An adaptation of Georges Sand's Claudie (subsequently re-named Rachel the Reaper). Strand, May 1852.
6. Art is an adaptation of Tiridaté, now known as Nance Oldfield. Strand, May 1852.
7. Gold. Romantic drama in five acts. Drury Lane, 10th January 1856.
8. Two Loves and a Life. Romantic drama. Four acts. With Tom Taylor. Adelphi, 18th April 1864.
9. King's Rival. Comedy. Five acts. With Tom Taylor. St James's, October 1864.
10. First Printer. Romantic drama. Five acts. With Tom Taylor. Princess's, 1864.
11. Honour before Titles (Nobs and Snobs). Comedy. St James's, 1865.
12. It is Never too Late to Mend. Drama. Four acts. Leeds, 10th February 1866.
13. Dora. Domestic drama. Three acts. Adelphi, 15th June 1867.
14. Double Marriage. Romantic drama. Five acts. Queen's, 25th October 1867.
15. Foul Play. Drama. Five acts. Leeds, May 1868.
16. Griffith Gaunt. Romantic drama. Five acts. Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1869.
17. Shilly Shally. Comedy. Three acts. Gaiety, 1st April 1870.
18. Put Yourself in His Place. Drama. Leeds, March 1870. Produced at the Adelphi the following year, under the title of Free Labour.
19. The Robust Invalid. Comedy in five acts, from Molière's Malaide Imaginaire. Produced at the Adelphi in conjunction with the foregoing.
20. The Wandering Heir. Liverpool, September 1873.
21. Jealousy. Comedy, from Sardou's Andrée. Olympic, 1875.
22. Joan. Drama in five acts. Liverpool, 1876. From Mrs Burnett's That Lass o' Lowrie's.
23. Drink. Realistic drama, six acts, from Zola. Princess's Whit Monday 1879.
24. Single Heart and Double Face. Domestic drama Never acted, but produced for Copyright purposes. 1863.
25. Love or Money. Drama with Pettitt. Adelphi, 18th November 1882.

WORKS OF FICTION

1. Peg Woffington. 1852.
2. Christie Johnstone. 1853.
3. Magazine Stories:—Clouds and Sunshine, Jack of all Trades, The Bloomer, etc. 1854-1856.
4. It's Never too Late to Mend. 1856.

5. White Lies; or, The Double Marriage. 1857.
6. Love me little love me long. 1859.
7. A Good Fight (Once a Week). 1859.
   The editor tried to edit him. Result, C. R. brought the story to an abruptly absurd happy conclusion, and set to work to transform it to
8. The Cloister and the Hearth. Published in 1861.
9. Hard Cash (All the Year Round). 1863.
10. Griffith Gaunt (The Argosy). 1866.
11. Foul Play. With Boucicault. (Cornhill?) 1868.
12. Put Yourself in his Place (Cornhill). 1870.
13. Wandering Heir (Christmas Number Graphic). 1872.
14. Terrible Temptation (Cassells). 1871.
15. A Simpleton. 1872.
16. A Woman Hater (Blackwood's anonymously). 1877.
17. Singleheart and Doubleface (Harper's). 1882.
18. A Perilous Secret (Tillotson's Serials). 1883. (Published in 3 vol. form by Bentley.) 1884.
19. The Eighth Commandment. 1860.
20. Various Short Stories published in Belgravia, Harper's, and other periodicals.
21. Articles in Pall Mall Gazette on Cremona Fiddles, Rights and Wrongs of Authors, etc., etc. (*See* Readiana published by Chatto.)

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The Riverside Press Limited, Edinburgh

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